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*Published in:*  
Nordisk kulturpolitisk tidsskrift

*DOI:*  
[10.18261/nkt.27.1.3](https://doi.org/10.18261/nkt.27.1.3)

Published: 29/05/2024

*Document Version*  
Final published version

*Document License*  
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*Please cite the original version:*  
Audunson, R., Eskola, E.-L., & Sunniva Evjen (2024). Location, Location, Location: The media debates on the New Central Libraries in Oslo and Helsinki. *Nordisk kulturpolitisk tidsskrift*, 27(1), 26-44. Article Vol. 27 Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.18261/nkt.27.1.3>

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# Location, Location, Location

## *The media debates on the New Central Libraries in Oslo and Helsinki*

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### Abstract

This paper examines how two library building projects, running almost parallel in Oslo and Helsinki, have played out in the public debate. How are these cultural policy investments received and discussed, and how do they adhere to the image of libraries held by the public as expressed in the media?

By analyzing articles, op-eds, and editorials from each capital's leading newspapers, we explore two main aspects of the debates. First, which perceptions on the role of libraries do the different stakeholders have, and to what extent are they conflicting? Second, we seek to identify the dominating discourses throughout the almost three-decade-long process. We know there are differences between Finland and Norway concerning public library policy, spending, and usage. Are these differences reflected in the public debates?

The analysis is informed by a modified garbage can approach (March & Olsen 1976; Kingdon 1984), where the coupling between problems, solutions, and participants with limited attention. The role of windows of opportunity, the relative strength of the policy field in question, and alliances are key elements in the analysis.

Our study shows that the main participants – or interest groups – are (local) politicians, architects, and library professionals. The latter group is the least dominant, especially in the Oslo debates, whereas library professionals are more active discussants in the Helsinki case, indicating that Finnish librarianship has a stronger position than the Norwegian policy field of librarianship. The “new public library discourse”, first formulated by the library directors in both cases, was gradually accepted by both cities' political and civil society environments. The modified garbage can model seems to be explanatory in both cities, although the model's anarchic elements are stronger in Oslo compared to Helsinki.

### Keywords

media debate, libraries, building projects, cultural policy, decision-making processes

## 1 Introduction and problem statement

In 2018 Helsinki's new central library, Oodi, opened its doors to the public. Two years later,

Oslo's new central library, Deichman Bjørvika, was inaugurated. Both buildings have achieved international acclaim and received high-ranking awards, e.g., the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) prize as the world's best public library, awarded to Helsinki and Oodi in 2019, and Oslo and Deichman in 2021. However, the road from idea to completion has been long and winding.

At the outset of the planning process, the situation in the two cities was different. Oslo's central library was regarded as outdated and cumbersome but was centrally located. Helsinki had a new and modern central library, but it was located in an area that had not developed as expected. In the early 1990s, Oslo's library director Liv Sæteren proposed moving the central library into new premises – a failed shopping mall. In Helsinki, the initiative came a few years later, from then Minister of Culture Claes Andersson, who wanted a more central location for the central library.

This paper is part of a case study of the larger project Political Dynamics of the Cultural Sector (POLYCUL), which aims to study dynamics in the cultural policy field. Our case study aims to explore the decision-making processes of the new central libraries in Oslo and Helsinki from the first initiatives to the completion of the two new central libraries. In this paper, we focus on the public debate as reflected in the press. In a later paper, data from interviews with decision-makers and planning documents will be used.

We explore the following research questions:

- Which perceptions of the public library can be identified in the public debate? Is the library seen as an institution promoting high-quality literature, as demand-driven and user-oriented, or as an urban meeting place with a variety of services and activities?
- To what extent do different stakeholders have similar perceptions of the role of the urban public library?
- Is the public debate on the new central libraries structured along political conflict dimensions, e.g., the left-right cleavage structuring many other issues in urban politics?<sup>1</sup>

The public discussions analyzed in this paper cover approximately 30 years. This period has seen important developments and changes in library policies, the growth of the information paradigm and the demise of the libraries' public enlightenment role in the 1990s, the growth of the meeting place role after the turn of the century, and the possible revival of public enlightenment over the last decade (Audunson 2023). Our research questions will help us understand the form and extent to which such trends manifest themselves in these projects, and the degree to which such trends have become entrenched among participants and stakeholders in the public debate.

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1. Public libraries are politicized in the sense that they are a public responsibility and receive their funds via public budgets decided by political decision-making bodies. But whereas other local government responsibilities, like schools, nursing homes, and kindergartens, are highly conflict-ridden along partisan lines, for example when it comes to issues such as the role of private entrepreneurs versus local government-owned institutions, user fees, etc., that has not been the case with libraries. The level of partisan political conflicts has, with some exceptions, been relatively low.

## 2 Background: Theoretical approaches and earlier research

### 2.1 Studying decision-making: Norms of rationality versus garbage can, mimetic imitation, fashion, and translation

There is a strong norm saying that public decisions should be rooted in rationality (Elster, 1989). Rationality presupposes decision-makers who know their preferences, and the means at their disposal for realizing the chosen preference and can undertake a systematic means/end analysis. Simon (1997) modified this model of rationality, describing it as unrealistic. Instead of optimizing the means/end analysis, decision-makers tend to follow a strategy of satisficing. The search stops when a satisfying status has been reached.

In a seminal work, March and Olsen (1976) introduced the garbage can model of decision-making. This supplants the rational model in which also Simon's model of limited rationality is anchored, with a more anarchistic model. According to the garbage can model, a decision is the result of the combination of independent streams: 1. A stream of problems looking for solutions, e.g., problems related to the quality of life in urban environments. 2. A stream of solutions looking for problems, e.g., we, the librarians, have the solution for your problem related to creating a livable urban environment. 3. A stream of participants with a limited span of attention regarding problems and solutions: which problems, solutions or issues that end up occupying the span of attention of participants in a decision-making process might be accidental. A garbage can perspective on the public debate can shed light on the extent to which the discussion in question follows a straightforward and precise agenda, or if attention is affected by other issues being thrown in and out of the agenda.

Christensen (2015) analyzed the decision-making process behind the building of Oslo's Opera House within a modified garbage can model based on Kingdon (1984). The anarchic framework in the garbage can model is in Kingdon's approach supplemented and modified with more instrumental elements such as entrepreneurship, and the formation of alliances.

Kingdon (1984) also introduced the term "policy windows" (of opportunity), which refers to what happens when streams flowing independently – problems, solutions, and politics – suddenly are "coupled by policy entrepreneurs at critical points in time in an effort to influence agenda setting and advocate policy alternatives" (Galligan & Burgess 2005). In general, this includes openings in the political process that can be utilized by policy fields or political actors to prove the relevance of "a solution" and gain access to the political agenda. Such windows include elections, the launching of major projects, or other game-changing developments. As Aberbach & Christensen (2001) note, change is most likely to occur when such windows of opportunity open up. And, when a window opens up, different policy fields fight for attention, thus igniting media debate and attention. To what extent is this the case in Oslo and Helsinki?

The strengths and weaknesses of a policy field are also relevant when examining the debates about the two library buildings. Christensen (2015) observes that decisions related to weak policy fields are vulnerable to influence from considerations and decisions from stronger policy fields and maintains that the field of cultural policy is an example of a weak policy field. Such fields are less likely to raise attention than strong and visible policy fields. Kulturutredningen<sup>2</sup> 2014 (NOU 2013:4) documents that in Norway, public libraries represent an even weaker sub-field within cultural policy. However, there might be differences regarding the relative weakness of the library policy field in Norway and Finland. Public

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2. A government white paper on cultural policy.

grants per capita are significantly higher in Finland/Helsinki compared to Norway/Oslo, Finnish libraries are used more extensively, and Finns perceive the library as useful along a broader spectrum of life spheres than do Norwegians (Vakkari et al. 2014). What can the debates tell us about the libraries' success in raising attention? One might expect weak policy fields to cause little public debate, or that discussions on major projects within weak fields are dominated by arguments and concerns related to stronger fields.

Following the modified garbage can model, Marianne Takle's study of the creation of the National Library in Norway (2009) shows how seemingly unrelated events can decide the outcome of a project. When the major Norwegian industrial company Norsk Jernverk was closed down in the town of Mo i Rana, an opportunity to solve two problems simultaneously opened up: premises for a National Library,<sup>3</sup> where storage space was of the essence, and jobs for people in the area. This was not an obvious choice and created discussion, especially among those who preferred a National Library in the capital city.

In addition to the modified garbage can perspective, we have chosen to include another dimension in non-rational perspectives on decision-making, namely imitation and translation (Røvik 2002; Røvik 2023). Rational decision-making presupposes a degree of means-end knowledge. When uncertainty is prevalent, uncertain actors turn to successful projects or organisations and try to mimic the "recipes". When engineers plan to build a bridge with increased capacity for a given amount of traffic, they have the necessary means-end knowledge to make rational decisions. But planning a library intended to increase library use, while preserving its role as a promoter of enlightenment and simultaneously developing it as a democratic arena, means-end knowledge is not clear-cut. To what extent do the library debates reflect imitation and translation, by referring to means-end arguments or references to successful library building projects such as the Seattle public library, or DOKK 1 in Aarhus?<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2 Public decision-making, public debates, and garbage can processes

The garbage can model (March & Olsen 1976) is primarily related to decision-making in organizations. How can we apply the model to analyse a public debate?

The public sphere, of which newspapers form a vital element, is a space for communication between the public authorities and civil society. The authorities use the public sphere to communicate their decisions, ideas, and proposals to citizens – the citizens use the public sphere to discuss decisions and proposals from the government – or bring forth issues. As such, debates in the public sphere are integral and vital parts of the decision-making process.<sup>5</sup>

When major public investments are discussed, we can distinguish between arguments related to the core purpose of the project and arguments related to side effects or different purposes. When planning for a new airport, arguments related to the effects on traffic regularity of choosing this or that site are linked to the core purpose. Effects on regional employment are examples of side effects or effects on a different purpose. Analyzing public debates

3. Up to that point the tasks of the Norwegian National library were placed with the University Library of Oslo.

4. Other theories focusing on the mobility and travel of organizational and policy recipes could have been chosen, for example, policy mobilities (Lewis, 2021), which seems to be very much related to Røvik's approach.

5. One recent example from Norway of the relationship between public debate and decision-making, is a proposal from the government to implement changes in the Norwegian Publicity Act, restricting the public's access to governmental documents. The proposal created a lively debate and ended with the government withdrawing the proposal.

is well suited to identify the balance between arguments related to the core purpose of the project being discussed versus arguments related to side effects or effects related to different purposes. This type of analysis also allows us to study how windows of opportunity affect the extent to which a project finds its way onto the public agenda. Does an issue, like the need for a new library or a new airport, represent its own opportunity with a capacity to find its way to the agenda, or does it have to link itself to broader concerns and interests outside its core purpose?

### 2.3. Earlier research on library buildings and design

Our study is also informed by scholarly work on library architecture and design specifically, although not within the theoretical perspective we primarily rely on. Alistair Black has in several works studied the historical development of library buildings and the relation between physical design and form on one side and forms of social engineering and control on the other, often adapting Foucauldian concepts, such as the panopticon and the birth of the clinic to library design (Black 2001; Black 2011).

Mattern has studied the design and architecture of metropolitan libraries, such as the Seattle public library (Mattern 2002; Mattern 2003; 2006). Her focus has been the publicness of public library projects. When the public is invited to engage in dialogue regarding design and content, is their input taken into consideration? Or are the decisions taken in a closed space without public influence? She concludes that in this regard public libraries are not as public as the ideal says.

Since the late 1990s, iconic cultural buildings have been linked to urban development, most famously with the so-called Bilbao effect (Meades 2017), in which a high-profile cultural institution revives an entire city. Real or not, the prospect of having economic or urban regeneration from investments in culture and arts has gained political and media attention.

This possible correlation between iconic libraries and urban development has also gained scholarly attention. Some take a historical approach, like Dahlkild (2013), who investigates how libraries' changing role and content through history is reflected not only in their architecture but also in how they have been placed in the urban setting. Hanna Carlsson's (2013) in-depth study of the Malmö central library developments suggested that ambitious library visions from the library management could collide with the public's view, thus creating conflict and resistance – a finding very relevant to us when we analyze the extent to which the library directors' visions find resonance in the public debate. Evjen's (2012) comparative study of central library developments in Birmingham, Aarhus, and Oslo showed the link politicians make between urban development and cultural policy, manifested in library building projects. They acknowledge that the planning process has contributed to developing their perceptions of what a modern library should be. Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Jochumsen & Skot-Hansen (2011) explore the libraries' role in urban development in their book *Biblioteket i byudviklingen* and find that libraries have the potential to affect the livability and sense of community in urban spaces.

These research projects, with different theoretical approaches, have generated empirical findings relevant to our project, related to libraries and urban development (Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Jochumsen & Skot-Hansen 2011), the possible challenges related to deviations between professional ideas and perceptions in the environment, (Carlsson 2013), the attitudes of urban politicians regarding public libraries (Evjen 2012) and the relationship between library design, library location and library roles (Dahlkild 2013). These findings form an important part of the background for our research, in addition to our chosen theoretical perspective.

### 3 Data collection and analysis

The present article is based on newspaper articles concerning the media debate about the library building projects. For the Oslo case, we used the database Retriever/A-tekst (1991-2019). We chose news articles, news items, columns, and editorials, and letters to the editor. The majority of retrieved articles come from *Aftenposten* (AP, national, daily newspaper, Oslo-based, conservative-leaning). We have also included articles from *Klassekampen* (KK, national daily newspaper, leftist leaning), *Dagsavisen* (DA, daily Oslo-based newspaper, affiliations to the social democratic party), *Morgenbladet* (MB, weekly Oslo-based newspaper, liberal with a cultural profile), *Verdens Gang* (VG, Oslo based, national newspaper, conservative/liberal-leaning), *Dagbladet* (DB, Oslo based, liberal-leaning). Search terms used were: (deichman\* or hovedbibliotek\*) and (bjørvika or vestbanen or byporten or “galleri oslo”).

For the Helsinki case, we used news articles and items, debate, columns, and leaders from the newspapers *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS), the leading daily newspaper in Finnish, and *Hufvudstadsbladet* (Hbl), the leading newspaper in Swedish. Several local newspapers cover Helsinki, but only these two papers covered the library debate. Both HS and Hbl are politically independent. HS was retrieved from the HS digital archive (1998-2018), and Hbl from the National Library’s database (1998-2004) and the database *Mediearkivet* (2005-2018). Search terms used were in Finnish *pääkirjasto* (main library), *keskuskirjasto* (centre library), *keskustakirjasto* (central library), and in Swedish *centrumbibliotek\** and *citybibliotek\**.

The total number of hits was almost 1600 in Helsinki and almost 5900 in Oslo. The difference can be explained by the longer time period for the Oslo case (1991-2019) compared to Helsinki (1998-2018), more Oslo newspapers, and lastly by the fact that in the Oslo case more locations were considered compared to Helsinki, resulting in new debates every time a new location was presented. Differences between the databases used – in Norway the commercial A-text/Retriever and in Helsinki both the newspaper database of the National Library and the commercial databases – might also have had some effect due to the different search possibilities in the databases.

The majority of hits were short news items with no or little interest for our research questions. Based on qualitative criteria, we have selected op-eds, editorials and interviews with stakeholders presenting views and perceptions on the two projects, the role of the urban central library etc. The number of articles selected for closer analysis was 540 in the Oslo case and 427 in the Helsinki case.

We have not included discussions from social media in our material. One reason is that this would only be a relevant source for the debate after 2008-2010. Another reason is the newspaper format, which generally allows more depth and reflection than posts on social media. In this study we try to elicit perceptions from stakeholders, which arguably are more developed in a longer text format. Also, we are focusing on public sphere debates. Social media are located in an intermediate or hybrid position – partly private, partly social, and partly public.

The analysis process followed the principles of qualitative thematic text analysis (e.g., Kuckartz, 2014). They include reading, coding the initial themes of discourses, rereading, and establishing the emerged themes of discourses, and identifying the windows of opportunities as well as stakeholders/participants of the debates and discussions in the material. By discourses, we refer to how we think, discuss, and describe institutionally rooted perceptions of the institution in question (Evjen & Audunson 2009). Discussions concerning libraries have been dominated by different discourses, for example the public enlightenment discourse in the first half of the 20th century, the discourse of equal democratic access in the

1950s and 60s, the discourse of democratic participation in the 1970s, the informational discourse of the 1980s and 1990s, demand and market-oriented approach also from the 1990s and the meeting place discourse from the early 21st century (Audunson 2023). All these discourses still exist, and discussants can find a basis for their arguments within them. In our analysis, we have tried to identify such discourses in the debates.

## 4 Findings

In the following section, we present the findings from the analysis of the debates. To clarify, the Oslo case can be divided into three distinct stages, which we refer to in the following section: First, the shopping mall stage, which lasted from 1991 till approximately 2000. At this stage locations such as Galleri Oslo – a failed shopping center from the 80s – a planned shopping center adjacent to the central railway station (Byporten), and a 70s high-rise erected by the Norwegian Post Service were the most discussed alternatives. Second, the Western Railway stage (Vestbanen) lasted from 2001 to 2008, and finally, the Bjørvika stage lasted from 2008 till the new library opened in 2020.

In the Helsinki process, there are no similar stages, even though location was the most discussed topic until the beginning of 2010.

### 4.1 Who are the participants in the debate?

An analysis of the participants in the public debate illustrates the relative strength or weakness of the library field: Does the library issue engage debate on a broader scale? Are librarians involved in the debate?

In Oslo, during the first stage, editorially produced articles dominated. Those invited by journalists to give their views on the shopping mall proposals illustrate how the media framed the issue. The majority of interviewees were cultural personalities, mostly authors, indicating that the library as a literary institution was at the core of the public discourse. There were few letters to the editor – 9 in total. Five of these are authored by two people – the secretary general of the Society for the Welfare of Oslo and a representative of the Friends of the Library – both critical of the shopping mall locations. Librarians other than the library director and her deputy, were not visible. Librarians authored only two contributions. The viewpoints of stakeholders presented in the newspapers belong mainly to authors and City Hall politicians.

When the City Parliament decided to locate the new library in the Vestbanen in 2001, and the OMA architectural group won the architectural competition, the public debate shifted. The specter of participants broadened, especially with architects and urban planners as eager participants. Politicians still dominated the debate, but compared to the previous stage, they were more concerned with the role of the library and its role in urban development. Other participants include representatives from several cultural institutions arguing for their interests, like the Munch Museum, the cinema, and the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, arguing that they deserved a central location in the new complex. Again, few library professionals participated. In our material, only one letter to the editor written by a Deichman representative deals with the role of the planned new library. However, the library director expands on the issue in several interviews. Other participants from the library field, like the Library Association, mainly express their frustration over what they perceive as lingering and call for concrete schedules.

In the last stage, when the location had moved from Vestbanen to Bjørvika, library professionals became more vocal. First, when the city council postponed the construction start



of the library, but continued the Munch Museum, the library field vehemently expressed its frustration over what they perceived as a de-prioritization. An intense debate started after the new City government in 2015 questioned the whole project due to budget overruns. This time the debate revolved around the library's role in the city and society in general, thus returning the attention towards librarianship and the library institution. A broad coalition of representatives from City Hall opposition, authors, and the literary public sphere headed by a revitalized Friends of the Library organized an all-around defense of the library projects in the press.

As for the Helsinki case, different voices took part in the debate over the years. From the chosen articles, the number of letters to the editor was 173 and the number of op-eds 27, the rest being news items, columns, notices, and interviews. The most prominent voices belonged to local politicians such as town councilors, but especially those being chairs of the culture and library board, or the board of city planning. While the politicians mostly supported the library project, they had different opinions of the location in the city center. However, divergent views of the importance of the central library were also expressed by the moderate right-wing Coalition Party. Before the municipal elections in 2000, the party leader questioned whether a new central library financed by tax money should be prioritized before basic services, like health, social services, and education (Tuohimaa 2000).

Leading library staff members took an active part in the debate throughout the process, most noticeably director Maija Berndtson. Also, cultural profiles participated, authors and people from the cultural sector. At various stages, different voices dominated. National high-profile politicians (ministers of culture) had a crucial role, especially in the initial stage. In interviews and cultural news coverage, people in leading positions were interviewed, such as the Mayor of the City of Helsinki and The Library Director, but also city officials, like city planners, as well as architects and engineers. Other participants included students and researchers.

Comparing the participants in our two cases, we find the following: Local politicians were most active in both cases, but also participants from the broader cultural field, particularly authors. The Helsinki and Oslo case differs regarding the role of librarians. Library professionals participated more actively in the public debate from the start in Helsinki compared to Oslo. In our view, this could be symptomatic of the stronger position libraries have in Finland compared to Norway. The Helsinki case is also characterized by the crucial role played by high-profile politicians and city politicians from the very start of the project. This public support probably served to anchor the project politically, and might be seen as a result partly of the Helsinki library's stronger position in the public compared to Oslo, and partly its greater success in building alliances.

#### 4.2 Windows of opportunity

Windows of opportunity, as explained in section 2.1, relates closely to the modified garbage can model and can be defined as openings in the political environment allowing an interest group to present its case as a relevant solution and raise public attention around an issue. Elections are examples of such windows. Both cities held several municipal elections during the years the libraries were debated. We cannot, however, observe any degree of increased media attention regarding the library projects related to election campaigns. The only exception is the intense debate regarding the Bjørvika-library immediately *after* the local election in Oslo in 2015. When the new city council questioned the whole project and threatened to stop it, it initiated a public debate where the library supporters could show the relevance of the building project for urban development as well as build alliances.

During the first period in Oslo, from 1991 to 2000, the new central library Oslo was framed relatively narrowly as an issue related to the needs of the library, without being linked to windows of opportunity connecting it to broader issues. The first notable window of opportunity came at the turn of the century when Parliament decided to build the new opera at Bjørvika instead of Vestbanen. Thus, an unrelated decision created a new dynamic and kicked the library issue out of a seeming deadlock. The decision to relocate the new library framed the issue in a broader context – the urban development of the area surrounding the City Hall and the popular shopping and restaurant district Aker Brygge.

Placing the new central library at the Vestbanen site was uncontroversial in itself. Still, the discussions ran high, especially regarding different architectural issues. The debate on the new central library was now integrated partly into a discussion of architecture, urban development, and aesthetics, and partly into a discussion of the future location of the Munch Museum – which the city council wanted to move to Vestbanen. In other words, issues external to the library tended to dominate the debate (See 4.3.2). The debate comprised broader groups compared to the preceding shopping center stage.

However, it turned out to be difficult to fill the 45000 square meters at the Vestbanen project, and the process stalled. In 2007 and 2008 two separate issues changed the course of the new central library. After having lost the battle of moving the Munch Museum to Vestbanen, the city council cast its eyes on Bjørvika as a possible site for the museum. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Culture needed a location for a new National Museum. That created a new window of opportunity – again linked to a development external to the library issue. After a political horse-trading between the city government and the Ministry of Culture, it was decided to build both the new library and the new Munch Museum at Bjørvika. The Norwegian government bought Vestbanen back, as a location for the new national museum. This process was presented as a *fait accompli* at a press conference in May 2008. The negotiations were secret and not subject to public discussion.

The final comprehensive debate in Oslo began in the autumn of 2015, following the local elections, which resulted in a change of government. When preparing its first budget, the new city council questioned the continuation of the library project, due to spiraling costs. This was the first time the new central library became a major consideration in such a decision-making situation. The majority of the participants in the subsequent debate – library professionals, politicians from the opposition, and other stakeholders – supported the library project and were vehemently opposed to any alternatives. A few, like the former director of culture in Oslo, Gro Balas, voiced her support for the city council's reconsideration, and even questioned the location of the building altogether (Aldridge & Henriksen 2015). She would not, she said, send her grandchildren to such a busy downtown location, and she implied that strengthening the branch libraries would be a wiser way to spend the city's resources.

Yet, the city council decided to move forward with the project, on the condition that the library would rent out some of its floor space and generate a set yearly income. This decision was in turn subject to debate. The question of the library's legitimacy and role when connected to commercial interests was discussed, especially within the library field.

Likewise, in Helsinki, issues unrelated to the library, such as the city's financial situation affected the central library building project. However, from the media coverage, we can identify several windows of opportunity which put forward the Oodi project.

Already in 1986 when the new main library in Helsinki was opened, the library personnel experienced that the location was problematic as the library was situated in Pasila, a few

kilometers outside the city center. City planning was at that point aimed at developing Pasila into a new center of Helsinki. When that failed, the library could not immediately start a discussion about a new city library more centrally located. The first ‘official’ window of opportunity to reignite the library discussion, was when Claes Andersson<sup>6</sup>, proposed a new main library in downtown Helsinki, in connection to the House of Parliament. He reasoned that all forms of art had their main buildings in the heart of the city – except literature.

In the same period, urban planning was frequently discussed in the media, mainly by local politicians. The central library was incorporated into this discussion, and it was a crucial platform for promoting the library plans. The development of the Kamppi and Töölö bay areas in the city center were the main locations connected to the central library plans, but even other options were debated. Also, the city planning debate offered the library personnel, especially the library director Maija Berndtson, an opportunity to bring forward the strong vision of the future library in the city center.

In 2006 the Mayor of Helsinki, Jussi Pajunen, initiated a process to further develop the library project concept, which resulted in the consultant report, *The Heart of the Metropolis* (Leisti 2008), an important basis for further work. The report addressed the role of libraries and their significance in Finnish society, and the libraries’ contribution to Finland’s successful journey to an equal and well-educated knowledge society. This brought to the debate the importance of a library close to its users in the city center. Also, the report connected the central library project to the centenary year of Finnish independence 2017, thereby contributing to raise government funding for the project, and giving the project a clear target date of completion.

In 2009, Helsinki was announced as the World Design Capital of 2012. This was an important event even for the future central library, as the project became part of the image of the design capital, which in turn also created debate. A Guggenheim Museum in Helsinki was discussed, and the media introduced a Guggenheim vs. the Central library debate since it would be impossible to pursue two projects of that scale. Overall, there seemed to be more support for the library in the media debate, as it was perceived as an important meeting place for all citizens, and a symbol for Finland’s independence.

Compared to Oslo, Helsinki had some high-profile windows of opportunity such as the centennial of national independence and Helsinki’s role as World Design Capital. Together with the library project’s integration into urban development plans, all these factors created broad support for the project and the vision of the future library – not only among politicians, but among library professionals, city planners and the general public. The process in Oslo – as the newspaper coverage reflects – was to a much larger extent influenced by external issues, or rather other building projects, like the new opera house, the new national museum, and the new Munch Museum. While the library certainly was discussed in the media, these three other monumental buildings created a lot more tension and debate.

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6. Cultural persona and Minister of culture 1995-1998, Left alliance.

### 4.3 Which discourses can be identified?

#### 4.3.1 The library discourse – the future library concept

In Oslo, the shopping mall period was characterized by an apparent conflict between two groups. The first, consisting of representatives from the cultural field, dismissed the shopping mall alternatives as they clashed with their idea of libraries as centers for literature and contemplation. Former minister of culture in the conservative government, Lars Roar Langslet, stated that in this discussion, managerial and economic considerations collided with traditional and cultural consciousness. He feared the latter would lose. “Placing one of Oslo’s most important cultural institutions here, in an architectural environment which is a mockery of tradition and aesthetics, is not a banal issue of moving an institution. It symbolizes how the city politicians perceive culture” (Langslet 1992). The other group, consisting of the Deichman library administration and other library professionals, argued based on what we can term “new public librarianship”. They highlighted the accessibility, user-friendliness, and attractiveness of these shopping mall alternatives. The library director Liv Sæteren publicly declared being tired of the authors’ traditional perception of a library (Hansen & Reese, 2002).

Politicians from the City Hall generally supported the relocation proposals without necessarily accepting ideas of a less book-oriented library. A central politician from the Liberal Party, a party profiling itself as an ardent supporter of the library, stated that he supported locating the library at Byporten, but simultaneously stated that the library should be a literary house, focusing on book lending (Bjørlo 1995).

After the decision to locate the new library to Vestbanen and particularly after the selection of the winning OMA-project, a user-oriented and less book-oriented perception of the library gradually dominated the discourse. The ideas of the professor in urbanism at the Norwegian School of Architecture and design, Karl Otto Ellefsen, captured the essence of this discourse: “The library is a meeting place, an arena for retrieving information and exchanging ideas – in short a living city space.” (Ellefsen 2002). Several other discussants with backgrounds from architecture and art stressed the necessity of changing the role of the library: “If the library not wholeheartedly changes into an information magazine, which aggressively orchestrates the coexistence of all existing technologies for collecting, condensing, distributing, reading and manipulating information, its unquestionable loyalty to the book will undermine its credibility”, commented one architectural historian (Lending 2003). Simultaneously, however, she reflects on the library as the last universally accessible non-commercial public space. The issue of commercialism versus non-commercialism was also an important topic in the debate.

It seems fair to state that between 1995 and the early 2000s, a fundamental change in the perception of the library’s role took place among important stakeholders. Liv Sæteren’s library vision from 1991 seemed to be broadly accepted and even embraced.

Although the library represents a public good, representatives from the library’s leadership seemed to take a market-oriented approach to library services. A leading member of the library project group wrote an article in *Aftenposten* in 2002 where he envisaged that the new library would offer a myriad of different activities going far beyond book lending, and these activities could compete with each other on an internal market (Voronel 2002).

In the last stage of the debate, when the city council threatened to stop the whole project due to exploding costs, such arguments dominated among those who entered the public battlefield to defend the project. Also, authors and cultural personalities who in the 1990s represented traditional perceptions of the library relied in this stage on arguments focusing

upon the library as a meeting place, a democratic space, and an arena attracting people from all social strata.

As for the Helsinki case, the ideas and visions of the library profession's visions of "new public librarianship" were formulated and presented in the public debate from the initiation of the process by the library director Maija Berndtson. She wrote in 2001: "Our aim is to respond to the needs and wishes of the citizens, to create a new type of "hybrid library", where old, traditional and new virtual materials can be found side by side. And even much more, on which different groups have suggested exciting and surprising suggestions. The goal is ambitious. The aim is to create a library, which would gain international attention, and bring one more attractive place to visit to the city of Helsinki. This means that the library needs a new building or spaces in a new building, which are planned to be as a library. The building has to be of high-quality architecture and be located in the absolute city centre" (Berndtson 2001). Her viewpoints were very much in line with those formulated by the library director in Oslo. This discourse resulted in a broad awareness of the library's importance for society, being a living room open for everyone, inclusive and equal, the vision which also was supported by the majority of politicians.

However, in the beginning of the process (e.g., 1998, 2001) politicians refer to the library as a house of literature and reading, while the discussion mainly was about the location. Later on (e.g., 2006, 2008, 2010) references to a more multifaceted building begin to appear, such as a house of literature combined with traditional library services, audiovisual culture, and information networks cooperating with media- and innovation companies in the same building. In the survey by HS in 2006, the city councilors supporting the central library reasoned that there was a need for a shared public space for the citizens, i.e. the meeting place discourse. This discourse was boosted by choosing the co-design concept towards the end of the process, making all the citizens part of the library project. During the process, only few citizens were concerned about the disappearance of the printed books and silent spaces in a new library.

We find that in both cities the library directors presented their ideas of a renewed public librarianship from the onset of the two processes and these ideas were gradually adopted and entrenched in the political environment and civil society.

#### **4.3.2 The urban development/urban planning and architectural discourse**

During the 1990s, the arguments for moving the library to new premises in Oslo were grounded in the needs of the library, the library staff, and the library users. Broader concerns relating to urban development were not a part of the discussion. One high-profile politician explicitly said to the newspaper *Aftenposten* that moving the library to Galleri Oslo would not affect urban development. The criticism of the locations presented in this shopping mall period, in particular Galleri Oslo, was rooted in architectural and aesthetical concerns, the relationship between these, and the values the library was supposed to promote. As the Langslet quotation indicated, these buildings were seen as an architectural "mockery" of the values and traditions of libraries. We find that these concerns were closely related to the traditional library discourse. Libraries should promote literary and cultural experiences and the buildings' (lack of) aesthetical qualities were regarded as antagonistic concerning that role.

That changed after the decision to build a new library integrated with a cinema center, a conference center, a hotel, and apartment buildings at the Vestbanen site. That project would affect the urban environment and consequently led to a discourse on urban planning. The relationship between architecture and the role and values of the library, which was prevalent

in the preceding period, was, to begin with not very visible. Rather, the debate focused on the consequences the planned, 18-story hotel could have for the urban environment as a whole, particularly the extent to which it would disturb the outline of the City Hall.

When the city government decided to move the library to Bjørvika, the urban development effects of seeing the opera, the Munch Museum, and the library in context were important concerns. The winning project in Bjørvika, however, was praised and did not create controversy. The 2015 debate, when the city council threatened to stop the whole project, brought forward a debate focusing on the library's role in urban community development. Both politicians and library professionals argued that the library was not only important for the library users but also for the Bjørvika area. This discourse had three main components: the library's potential as a democratic space in an environment dominated by elitist institutions such as the Opera and the Munch Museum, its potential to attract people from all social strata to this environment, and its potential to link Bjørvika to the city as a whole.

In Helsinki, the debate concerning the location of the new central library connects closely to Helsinki's urban development and planning. The Töölö Bay area was the most discussed location. Library representatives favoured this area, along with other stakeholders. This area already contained prominent cultural buildings such as The Finlandia Hall, completed in 1971, The Opera House (1993) and Kiasma, the contemporary art museum (1998), and The Helsinki Music Centre was completed in 2011. Other possibilities were discussed, such as the commercial and business center of Kamppi and the Hakaniemi Bay area, about one kilometer to the east of the city center. In 2001, the social democratic chair of the board of city planning Maija Anttila, commented that library director Maija Berndtson's opinion about the suitability of the Hakaniemi contained a prejudiced attitude towards the area, which Anttila herself considered as a developing and interesting district (Anttila 2001). Politicians from the same party preferred different locations as the member of Parliament and 1st vice chairman of Helsinki City Council Rakel Hiltunen (Social democratic party) did while suggesting that the city of Helsinki and the state would together start planning a library in the Töölö Bay area (Tuohimaa 2002). Also, representatives of the Greens brought up different options, for example Kamppi (Oksanen 2002) and Kaisaniemi Park (Helistö 2007).

The architects and architecture students who participated in the discussion supported the concept of the future library. Architecture was also discussed as a possibility for city branding and to gain international acclaim.

The role of the library in urban development is in line with Hvenegaard Rasmussen, Jochumsen & Skot-Hansen's findings (2011), and is very visible in both cities. In both cities, we also see that the library is integrated into a cluster of cultural institutions. In Oslo, the cluster consists of the Opera, the Munch Museum, and the library, and in Helsinki respectively of the Finlandia Hall, the Opera House, the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the Helsinki Music Centre, and the library.

#### **4.3.3 Priorities and oppositions: is librarianship a weak policy field?**

During Oslo's shopping mall period, the issue of establishing a new central library never gained access to decision-making bodies, despite media attention and debate, and verbal support from almost all political parties. This indicates low political priority and in turn the relative weakness of the library policy field. Parallel with the library location debate, discussions regarding the location of three other cultural buildings also took place – the new Opera House, the Munch Museum, and the National Museum. These projects, particularly the Opera and the National Museum, were issues higher on the political agenda than the new central library, and also subject of more media interest. The press coverage clearly indicates

that these highly prioritized projects in important ways decided the outcome of the library location issue. When the city council decided to build Deichman and the Munch Museum in Bjørvika, the news gained broad national attention. The headlines referred to the museum, not the library.

In Helsinki, several cultural “houses” were planned parallelly with the central library. The most important competitors to the library project were Musiikkitalo (Music Centre) and the Guggenheim Museum. These generated debates around whose interests should be heard, the prioritization of cultural activities, as well as financing. The library was put on hold due to the building of the higher-prioritized Music Centre, which opened in 2011. The city could not proceed with two projects of that magnitude at the same time. Additionally, concerns about whether a new central library entailed deterioration of the branch library network were brought up by the citizens but also by some politicians in the Coalition Party and the Communist Party in Finland. Also, there were discussions concerning cultural investments as opposed to investments in other areas, like health care or education. The public discussion about the financing and costs increased during 2008 – 2010 due to the global financial crisis.

#### **4.3.4 Which discourses dominate, and which group represents which discourse?**

In the Oslo case, we can identify three periods with three dominating discourses. During the shopping mall period, a future library discourse with a focus on accessibility and functional architecture collided with a discourse founded on traditional perceptions of what a library is. The library management, supported by local politicians, represented the first discourse. Influential authors and cultural personalities, and influential civic organizations such as the Society for the Welfare of Oslo represented the latter. In the Vestbanen period, although the modern library discourse had gained ground, an architectural and urban planning discourse dominated, with a focus on architecture and aesthetics more than the library’s role in urban development. In the final and decisive stages of the Bjørvika project, the focus was on the role of the library as a vehicle for creating urban spaces, pluralistic meeting places and democratic space.

In Finland, the most dominating discourses were the urban development/urban planning discourse represented mostly by the local politicians, and the future library concept including the requirement for the location in the city center brought forward by the Helsinki city library, especially the library director Maija Berndtson as well as the library and culture board.

## **5 Discussion and conclusions**

We will now return to a discussion of our research questions and the fruitfulness of our chosen theoretical approach.

Which perceptions on the role of the urban public library do we find and do different stakeholders hold different perceptions? Those were our two first research questions. As mentioned earlier (see 4.3.1.), user orientation as opposed to librarianship’s traditional book orientation was a central idea behind both projects and was expressed by the library directors in the public debate. Our findings indicate that when the projects started, traditional perceptions of the library dominated among stakeholders outside the library. In Oslo, conflicts were tense between spokespersons for traditional library values and the new librarianship represented by the library directors. Gradually, however, the new concepts were accepted and adopted by politicians as well as civil society in both cities. They were not, as Hanna Carlsson found in Malmö, rejected. (Carlsson 2013). There could be several expla-

nations for this, but the time aspect in both cities could be one. As our study shows, the lengthy processes gave way to a changing debate and allowed the library to be developed, discussed, and finally accepted as how a contemporary library should be.

What about political conflict dimensions? The debate between the supporters of a traditional library versus the proponents of new librarianship seems to be a value conflict not structured along a left-right dimension: The group representing the traditional library discourse in this first stage of the debate consisted both of a conservative former minister of culture, as well as authors with a strong leftist leaning. The Munch issue, which had a strong influence on the library project, was structured along a left-right dimension. The conservative party wanted to relocate the Munch Museum, whereas the left-wing parties were equally eager to keep the museum in its original working-class district location. And during ‘the final countdown’, the debate following the city council’s threats to stop the library project in 2015, followed left-right partisan lines. There were no left-right conflict dimensions in Helsinki regarding the traditional versus new library view, although some politicians in the right-wing parties questioned the importance of the library project.

As for participants, the two cases differ in the sense that both government politicians and central librarians were more active in the public debate in Helsinki compared to Oslo. The exception was the intensive weeks in 2015 when the Oslo project was threatened. One might wonder why Norwegian librarians were more reticent than their Finnish colleagues to participate in public debates. Did they perceive the building and location as issues about architecture and politics? Or does it reflect differences in the strength of the library field between Norway/Oslo and Finland/Helsinki? Is the Finnish library field – and by extension Finnish librarians – more self-assertive with easier access to public debates?

One element in the modified garbage can model is that the combination of problems looking for solutions (window of opportunity), solutions (librarianship) looking for problems, and participants with limited attention often is anarchic and accidental. The newspaper debate indicates that these anarchic elements are very visible in the Oslo case. Developments external to the library issue affect attention and lead to deviations. The Helsinki process seems more straightforward.

Another element in the modified garbage can model is the role of windows of opportunity. Our findings support the importance of such windows. The Oslo case was for the first 10 years framed in the media debate as a library issue – the old building was outdated and impractical and not adapted to modern librarianship focusing on users, not books. The debate reflects this relatively narrow focus. Until 2000, the central library issue in Oslo was primarily discussed within a librarianship logic. The proposed locations were presented as answers to problems faced by the library, not broader challenges faced by the city. At this stage, the issue did not succeed in having access to any one decision-making situation.

The Helsinki case was from the very start linked to broader urban development projects, and later to windows of opportunity such as the upcoming 100th anniversary of Finnish independence and Helsinki’s appointment as World Design Capital 2012. The project of building a new central library could, in line with classical garbage can theory, present itself as a very relevant solution to challenges related to urban development in the area in question, to the anniversary of the independence, as well as meeting the challenge of being the world’s design capital.

When comparing the two projects, the importance of alliances and political anchoring also becomes evident. As stated above, the Oslo process was for the first 10 years framed as a library project, and the first initiative to move the library to new premises was taken by the library director. In Helsinki, the first initiative was taken by the Minister of Culture. It



illustrates how a highly profiled cultural politician stood firmly behind the Helsinki project from the start, whereas a former Norwegian minister of culture, Lars Roar Langslet in strong words attacked the library director's shopping mall proposals.

Another point made by Christensen (2015) is that cultural policy is weak compared to other policy fields. And within the weak field of cultural policy, the field of librarianship is the weak little brother (NOU 2013:4) – at least we can interpret the Oslo debate this way, particularly the role arguments related to concerns external to the library issue. The defining turns in the development of the new central library came about as cultural issues higher up on the political agenda created windows of opportunity, e.g., the decision to move the Opera from the Vestbanen site to Bjørvika and the need for a suitable site for the new National Museum. The Helsinki case, however, with the strong involvement documented in the public debate from centrally placed politicians, indicates that the library field in Finland has a stronger position in the cultural policy field, to a lesser extent affected by external decision-making processes. Thus, the anarchic elements of the modified garbage can model seem very well suited to the Oslo process, with different proposals thrown in and out, political parties changing positions throughout the process, and external issues, in particular museum issues, having a decisive influence on the library process. The Helsinki process seems more linear and less anarchic.

## 6 Further research

Analyzing articles in the press has given important insights into the public debate leading to the final decisions of the two projects and their conclusion. Still, newspaper articles need to be supplemented with other empirical material. We have, for example, seen that one conclusive decision was taken without public debate: to move Deichman from the Western railway station to Bjørvika. To get a more profound understanding of the process, we need other kinds of data.

In a forthcoming paper, we will go deeper into the questions discussed here based on interviews with key participants and the study of planning documents and policy papers.

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## Appendix 17

Finnish data					
Media category	Source	Retrieved from	Search terms	Number of hits	Analysed
National, Helsinki-based daily newspaper (in Swedish)	Hufvudstadsbladet (Hbl)	Digital Collections of the Finnish National Library digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi Time period: 1998-2004	centrumbibliotek* OR citybibliotek*	41	223
		Mediearkivet <a href="https://www.retriever-info.com/services/archive.html">https://www.retriever-info.com/services/archive.html</a> Time period 2005-2018	#centrumbibliotek*  #citybibliotek*	425	
National Helsinki-based daily newspaper (in Finnish)	Helsingin Sanomat (HS). Sections: news articles and items, debates, columns, leaders	Newspaper's own search engine <a href="https://www.hs.fi/arkisto/">https://www.hs.fi/arkisto/</a> Time period 1998-2018	keskuskirjasto, keskustakirjasto pääkirjasto  (Terms searched separately)	1130	181
Norwegian data					
Media category	Source	Retrieved from	Search terms	Number of hits	Analyzed
National, Oslo-based daily newspaper	Aftenposten. Sections: news articles, news items, debate, columns, editorials	Retriever/A-tekst  Time period 1991-2019	deichman* OR hovedbibliotek* AND #bjørvika or #vestbanen or # byporten or #”galleri oslo”	4072 (fra 08- 20 678)	08-2020: 206
National daily newspaper	Klassekampen	Retriever/A-tekst  Time period 1991-2019	deichman* OR hovedbibliotek* AND #bjørvika or #vestbanen or # byporten or #”galleri oslo”	650	08-2020: 63
National, Oslo-based newspaper	Verdens Gang, Dagbladet, Dagsavisen	Retriever/A-tekst Time period 1991-2019	deichman* OR hovedbibliotek* AND #bjørvika or #vestbanen or # byporten or #”galleri oslo”	DA: 61 DB: 478 VG: 473	08-2020DA: 27 08-2020DB: 47 08-2020VG: 21
Oslo-based weekly newspaper	Morgenbladet	Retriever/A-tekst  Time period 1991-2019	deichman* OR hovedbibliotek* AND #bjørvika or #vestbanen or # byporten or #”galleri oslo”	134	08-2020: 35

7. No. of hits and articles analyzed are not the same. We have picked articles/op-eds etc. but included in this search (or in the number of hits) are also press releases and short pieces that we have not used. In the Finnish material the search term 'pääkirjasto' (main library) resulted in a high number of irrelevant hits. It was applied because the citizens used to refer to the central library as a main library specifically in the beginning of the process.