



## **Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) in Collaboration to Meet the Needs of Users**

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### **Abstract:**

*How can an increasing collaboration between different cultural heritage institutions become a great benefit to their users by utilizing the existing resources in a better manner? In Gävle, there are relatively many cultural heritage institutions, both local as well as regional and national. In 2003, a closer collaboration was launched between the Main Library of Gävle, Gävleborg County Museum, the Municipal Archives of Gävle and the County Library. Throughout the years, this group has expanded and now totals eight different cultural heritage institutions. Our aims are to develop services for our users, to increase accessibility, to increase exposure of the rich body of information that can be found in the different institutions and to gain in efficiency by working together. For the personnel, this has involved in-service training and a growing understanding of each other's professions. Some concrete projects and future activities will be described.*

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### ***Gävle Municipality***

The authors of this document represent the Public Library of Gävle Municipality and the Municipal Archives of Gävle. These two institutions constitute units within the Library Division that, in turn, is a part of the Department of Culture and Recreation.

Gävle Municipality has the local responsibility for education, social services, care of the elderly and those with handicaps, housing development, transportation, public spaces, culture and recreation, energy and water supply, and housing provision.

Gävle is located about two hundred kilometers north of Stockholm. More than 94,000 people live here, of which around 70,000 reside in the city. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Gävle has been the county seat. The County Administrative Board resides here and its head, the County Governor, lives here too. Her official residence is in the castle, which originates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The county consists of two provinces, Gästrikland, in the south, and Hälsingland, in the north. Gävle also harbors the regional hospital and university. Besides the County Administrative Board, there are other national administrative offices, such as the County Court, the National Land Survey and the regional offices of businesses and other organizations.

Gävle is a shipping port and received its town charter in 1446, from King Christopher of Bavaria. In the past and present, its position has had great strategic importance for commerce and shipping. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gävle was the port from which the first emigrants left Sweden in hope of a better future and which, for most of them, turned out to be America. Compared to the other coastal cities farther north, Gävle had advantages because of the special privileges that her large trading houses enjoyed, and this promoted the success of a number of Gävle businesses, that continued on to make considerable fortunes. Luxurious homes in the city center and summer homes on the coast are to this day monuments to their successes. Other examples are various funds and foundations in their names, which still yield returns, making it possible to dole out scholarships and grants for social and cultural purposes.

Gävle is and has been an entrepreneurial city. The businesses have varied. Shipbuilding, cast iron products, porcelain, personal hygiene and beauty products, coffee roasters, candy makers, not least the still-popular Ahlgrens Cars and throat lozenges from Läkerol and Pix. Today, Gävle is known for the development of smart homes and geographical information systems. In Gävle, you can often smell the aroma of candy, coffee or, not as pleasant, the smell of fish and pulp mills.

## ***MLA in Sweden***

The cooperation of museums, libraries and archives has more or less gone on for several decades, nationally, regionally and locally. In a report on the situation, completed in 2002 on the orders of the government, some distinct features emerged:

*“MLA activity will be achieved only when archives, libraries and museums actively work together on solving a task within their areas. In a true MLA collaboration, all three sectors should be represented.”*<sup>1</sup>

The basis of all our work stands ultimately on democratic, constitutional statutes, the fundamentals of which are the freedoms of speech and of the press, the right of access to public information and documents, from the present to the future, life-long learning and the protection and encouragement of access to our common cultural heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> Gram, Magdalena. *ABM. Samverkan mellan Arkiv, Bibliotek och Museer*. 2002.

There is a Swedish National MLA Center, established in 2004. Its work is aimed at cooperation, coordination, accessibility and connection – archives, libraries and museums. The purpose is to make possible cooperative ventures in digitization and new technology and to further interdisciplinary in-service training. There are several different professions involved in the MLA and it is not an entirely uncomplicated task to bridge over our own different notions about each other's missions and professional roles. A special web site, containing information about the MLA Center's activities can be found at [www.abm-centrum.se](http://www.abm-centrum.se).

Besides the MLA Center, there is also a joint portal network for regional joint action groups, which was launched five years ago, "*Portalnätverk – regional ABM-samverkan I Sverige*".<sup>2</sup>

From the start, the participants have directed their attention toward questions of digitisation and accessibility, seen from the needs of users. The portal is a forum for discussion and a platform for exchange of experiences. It is an open, loosely knit and welcoming network for anyone who works with similar issues.

After an extensive national survey of Swedish culture and, among other things, a separate museum report, the government introduced a bill, entitled "*Tid för kultur*" (Time for Culture) which partly contained directives for a future delegation of responsibility within the cultural sector and partly offered models for the payment of national cultural grants and subsidies.<sup>3</sup> In a special section, the emphasis is on the value of cooperation within the MLA disciplines and, in particular, regarding digitization, aiming to give citizens and researchers access to our cultural heritage, irrespective of physical location. Digital developments offer the so-called memory institutions completely new possibilities. The government has therefore given the large, central cultural heritage institutions and authorities the task of contributing suggestions that should lay the foundation for a national strategy for digitization, electronic access and electronic preservation. It is especially important that the MLA institutions (memory institutions) have several common challenges to address. Creating a national strategy is right in line with the initiatives being taken on the European level, establishing a European digital library, called *Europeana*, for digitized cultural material from all of Europe (books, periodicals, photographs, movies, audiovisual works, archival documents, museum artifacts, monuments and archeological objects and sites). The EU member states have committed to establishing national strategies and objectives for digitization and digital preservation and to promote synergies between the different institutions that are involved in the process of digitization and electronic access to cultural material and digital preservation.

The Swedish government proposal emphasizes the importance of the MLA institutions for regional development, for cultural tourism as well as the potential for employment opportunities.

*"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting"*  
*Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

## ***MLA in Gävle***

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<sup>2</sup> <http://abm.ylm.se/portalnatverk/>

<sup>3</sup> Government bill 2009/3:10, *Tid för kultur*.

The ambition to create a local joint effort started in the year 2003. The bases for the initiative were both the national report on MLA in Sweden and the municipality's document, Vision 2010, in which "The Gävle of Knowledge" (Kunskapens Gävle) was emphasized. To get the collaboration going, the Main Library of Gävle, which is the municipality's head library, took the initiative, alongside the County Museum and County Library. At the Main Library, a special MLA position was created, for a librarian to organize the development of cooperation between the institutions involved at the time. Since the start, the Main Library has acted as the convener. Initially, cooperation was established with the County museum, the County Library and the Municipal Archives of Gävle. Subsequently, a number of joint efforts have had good results and the MLA Group has expanded in size.

From the advent of 2004, the MLA cooperation is represented in the Municipality's library plan, which is approved by the political board. Upon reading this, it is clear that the MLA collaboration should be developed in order to facilitate local historical research. In the municipality's recently approved guidelines, Vision 2025, there is an emphasis on, among many things, the section that the MLA Group in Gävle has come quite far with, which is "*to build up well-functioning networks and meeting places to facilitate cooperation*". The common vision for the Municipality is itemized in the cultural political program for Gävle Municipality, approved in 2008. According to this, we must always be open to interdisciplinary collaboration, networks and appreciate that one of our common tasks is to preserve our cultural heritage and make it accessible.

As of this year, the intentions of the collaboration have been worded into a declaration of intent, within the MLA Group in Gävle. One of the bases has been geographical, that is to say that all of the member institutions have their main operations in Gävle. Here, Gävle is well qualified, since there is an unusually broad scope of established cultural heritage institutions with various aims and mandates in the city.

In the MLA group in Gävle, there are currently the following eight institutions:

- The Archives of Gävleborg, a regional archive with the duty of storing archives from the private sector.
- The Municipal Archives of Gävle, a local archive with the mission to store archives from the municipality's activities.
- The County Council Office of Records, a regional archive with the task of managing the archives from the County Council's activities, e.g. health care.
- Gävleborg County Library, a regional library that supports and furthers development within the library sector countywide.
- Gävleborg County Museum, a regional museum dedicated to preserving the county's cultural heritage.
- The Main Library of Gävle, the main local library of Gävle Municipality.
- The Prison Museum of Sweden, a national museum that preserves the history of Swedish correctional measures
- The Swedish Railway Museum, a national museum with the task of preserving the history of Swedish railways.

Learning about one's history is something that increasing amounts of people are interested in. An interest in genealogy, local history or special interests, such as railways, shipping or the history of the working class can give people reasons to visit one of our cultural heritage institutions. Regardless of what one is searching for, it can be difficult to know where to begin looking. One must often visit several places to collect information. Another problem is the

geographical distance. Limited office hours make it difficult for people who do not live in Gävle to travel and do research on the spot.

The MLA Group works together to increase the accessibility of our collections. By paying study visits to each other and meeting with each other, we learn where different kinds of information can be sought. We can then give our visitors a better service, whether they seek archival documents, books or artifacts. Our aim is to reach out to many different target groups. Knowledge of our cultural heritage shall be made easily available to everyone. Our collaboration can manifest itself, for example, in digitization projects, technical solutions, production of printed matter and marketing, courses, exhibits or joint activities, like Genealogy Days and Cultural History Days.

Our MLA collaboration is not limited to or bound to the present participants. Depending on which project is to be completed or which results are to be compiled, there are fine opportunities for institutions, located in other places in the county, to take part. Successful collaboration requires both flexibility and the ability to see additional possibilities.

### ***Some concrete examples of the MLA collaboration***

The close cooperation between the MLA institutions has grown over a number of years. Initially it involved a phase of getting to know each other and the various operations, but through the years it has resulted in some concrete collaborative projects.

#### **A. Literature about Gästrikland and Hälsingland – a digitization project**

One of the first collaborative projects dealt with the digitization of a large bibliographic work about literature from Gästrikland and Hälsingland, written by Anna-Lisa Hillbom. Anna-Lisa Hillbom was a legendary librarian from Gävle, who became known to the public as “Storveta” (loosely translated as “Knows-a-lot”) because of her all-round education and TV appearances. Upon retiring, she spent her time putting together a bibliography covering Gävleborg County. The three-volume work, *Litteratur om Gästrikland och Hälsingland*, (Literature about Gästrikland and Hälsingland) was finished in time for Anna-Lisa Hillbom’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2002. Weste Westeson, former County Librarian, made sure that the work was finished and had it printed.

In 2005, we discussed how the bibliography could be digitized and made available on the Internet. At a meeting in January 2006, with representatives from the MLA institutions, the Municipal Archives of Gävle, Gävleborg the County Museum, the City Library and the County Library, it was decided to apply for a grant for this purpose. The Swedish State had contributed funds so that academics would be able to find work within the cultural sector, with targeted development projects. At another work meet with the MLA Group in Gävle, the process of working with the bibliography and the intended digitization was clarified. In March of 2006, the state announced that it had allocated funds for this project.

In June 2007, a press release was finally sent out, publicizing the digitized bibliography *Litteratur om Gästrikland och Hälsingland*. Anna-Lisa Hillbom’s bibliography is now digitized and available on the Internet at [www.gastrikehalsingelitteratur.se](http://www.gastrikehalsingelitteratur.se).

## **B. *Majken and Melker*, a Children's Book about the History of Gävle**

*Majken and Melker visit Amir in Gävle*, is the title of a children's book, which describes the city of Gävle, a selection of occurrences and buildings, in both the present and past. The initiator of the book project was Marie-Louise Andersen, employed at the Gävle Municipal Department of Culture and Recreation. The book project turned out to be a collaboration between personnel from the Main Library of Gävle, the Municipal Archives, the County Museum, public schools and the Immigrant Center under the direction of Marie-Louise Andersen.

Most books about Gävle are written for adults. There was no good book for children, that could be used in the teaching of local history in schools. The book was published in the Municipal Department of Culture and Recreation's publication series, *Natur och kultur*, in 2006. The series encourages publication of books on local history, but that was the first time a children's book was published there.

Today, many children do not hear stories told in a natural way about the history of their hometown. The parents are often new to the area and the older generation lives perhaps far away and sometimes even in another country. Many of the children's teachers come from other cities and do not have a relationship to the district. Knowledge of our history is important for us to be able to understand our society. It generates a feeling of context, local identity and security, which is the foundation for greater openness, in order to take in impressions from other parts of the world.

The purpose of the book project was to tell the history of the city of Gävle, but the book was also to function as a reader, with dialogues between children and adults. The target group for the book was to be children in preschools and elementary schools, but the book also works well with newcomers. It is a non-fiction book for children where history mixes with the present. It has a narrative text and factual summaries dispersed throughout, which inspire and awaken curiosity. The book became a marketing project as well.

A school class was used as a reference group in working with the book, in keeping with the spirit of the UN Children's Convention. The starting point for the book was the questions the children themselves asked about Gävle. *Why is it named Gävle? Where does the Gavle River start and where does it end up?* It was felt important to shed light upon several other aspects. *What can kids from other cultures be expected to be interested in? How do you teach local history to children in a global world? Where were children in the history of Gävle? Have children been in prison?* The contents of the book can awaken continued discussions, which teachers can utilize in their lessons. Many of the stories can be connected to current affairs. Many poor people lived in tent cities in Gävle after the great city fire of 1869. Parallels can be drawn to how it looks in e.g. Haiti today. For children who have fled with their parents from countries stricken by crisis or war, the story can give hope that things might improve in their homeland. The main thread in the book is the Gavle River, which flows through the city. In the book there is a map and the narrative is set up as a walking tour.

At the book's press release, the children in the reference group were invited in. They also participated later in the evaluation. At present, the children's book has been translated into the most common immigrant languages in Gävle, Somali, Arabic and Sorani (Central Kurdish).

## **C. Programs and Other Activities**

The different MLA institutions in Gävle have worked together with a number of programs and activities, for example:

- Göteborg Book Fair and local book fairs in Gävle.
- Genealogy Days and meetings
- Lecture series on municipal history from different viewpoints
- Local History Days /meets
- Archives Day

### **Book Fair**

In the MLA Group, the question arose in 2006, of creating a common exposure at the yearly Swedish Book Fair, arranged in Gothenburg (Göteborg) - this to bring out the local authors and local publications in Gävle and the rest of the county. In the shared exhibition stand, Gävleborg County Museum, the County Library and the Main Library of Gävle were represented. The MLA Group has since then participated yearly in the Gävle showcase at Göteborg Book Fair.

The Main Library of Gävle has organized local book fairs four times since 2004. They have had a visitor frequency of around 1,700- 2,500 per day. The goal has been to emphasize local writers of fiction and non-fiction, plus gaining exposure for researchers and organizations that have published material in the MLA area. Besides lectures, book tables, exhibits and sales, the local book fairs have become an important meeting place for the MLA institutions, local historians and the public. The MLA institutions have been able to present their works with exhibits, talks, publications and by showcasing the digitization that has been accomplished so far.

### **Genealogy Days**

Genealogy Days at the Main Library of Gävle were arranged in January 2007. This has become a recurring event, where representatives for the MLA institutions show their current digital projects and inform the public about the different archives.

### **Lecture Series**

In the autumn of 2006, planning began for some longer lecture series about our local history, together with local historical societies. Several of the MLA institutions were involved. These lecture series continue to this day. Examples of themes are: *City Architecture in Gävle*, *The History of Fishing Industry*, *The History of the City Districts* etc.

### **Local History Days**

In 2006, the prelude began to the Local History Days, which have become quite appreciated. The MLA members have the opportunity to present themselves along with people who have used the archives for research and written articles, as well as pamphlets and books with an historical connection to Gävle Municipality.

### **The Archives Day**

In Sweden, Archives Day is arranged every year, the second Saturday in November. Institutions that have archives and research facilities usually stay open and arrange something special. The participants share advertisement costs and did so on the latest occasion in 2009.

A quiz was also devised, with prizes, in order to attract visitors and encourage them to go to all of the open institutions. The answers to the questions were available at each place. It was a good idea, but needs to be re-worked a little. Perhaps next time there will be a quiz that can be completed by visiting the web sites, an alternative to a physical visit.

## **D. Joint Brochure**

In December 2008, the MLA Group agreed to produce an information brochure together. The existing brochure, from 2006, did not include all of the institutions currently participating in the collaboration. For several years, the group has discussed the possibility of creating a joint portal, but we still have a few things left to iron out, like organization and technical solutions. The brochure seemed like a surmountable, reasonable project to complete.

Especially during the summer, when there are a lot of tourists and visitors in Gävle, Sweden as well as foreigners, we have felt that we lack a simple brochure that presents all of the MLA institutions and how to find them. We also have many foreign visitors to our institutions, which is why we also wanted to have an English translation.

The aim of the brochure is mainly to inform our different users, but also to be a tool for different personnel groups, since the brochure gives information about who the members are, what their mission is, what their archives and collections contain and where they can be found.

Just in time for Archives Day, November 14, 2009, the brochure was finished and we held a press showing, to attract attention to our work and the brochure itself. Local press and regional TV-news responded immediately. The brochure is now linked to each member's web site and it has now been translated to English.

## ***Future Areas of Development***

### **A. A joint web portal for the county**

In 2009, a committee was formed, with representatives from all of the county's public libraries, the Municipal Archives of Gävle, and the college and hospital libraries, in order to collaborate on a joint web-portal for the county. The goal is to show the resources available at all the libraries and in the Municipal Archives in Gävle. This year, the Municipal Archives are installing a new and advanced system for graphic registration. By connecting with the libraries' systems, it will be possible to expose the collections via the public web interface, and thus develop the close cooperation between archives and libraries for the users we share. The goal is to market the services we offer to facilitate the search for information and to strengthen our cooperation throughout the county. Via the portal, it will be possible to do searches in both archives and library materials, to order material and receive electronic access to both older and newer media in full text. It is also meant to be a forum for dialogue with our users.

### **B. Virtual Gävle**

Gävle has a long tradition of being a world leader in cartography and related subjects. The region has developed into a national center of expertise in the area of geographic information systems (GIS), where many independent organizations and private companies are established



in the vicinity. The National Land Survey in Gävle has been the driving force during the 1980's.

In 2008, the Virtual Gävle Project was launched to stimulate the development of new GIS applications in more "soft" sectors of the municipality. Both the Main Library and the Municipal Archives are on the governing board of the project. There is an immense interest in making historical archive material accessible to a broader public. The project aims to tie together digitized historical source materials and different databases with positions on maps from different epochs, via Gävle municipality's GIS platform. Possibilities are created for an interface where you can seek information in several dimensions. Not just temporal, but also in space and place. The database, *Virtual Gävle*, contains occurrences, persons, artifacts, documents etc. The goal is to increase citizens' access to historical facts, to increase interest in and knowledge about local history and to create and supply local schools with educational aids.

In the first stage of the project, a prototype has been developed. The database is now being used to load historical facts about persons, streets, squares and the names of city blocks in Gävle, which are linked to a position on the map. This is a three-year project.

The project has enormous potential for development, but needs both economic support and personnel for data input, and these have not been allocated to date. The MLA Group that exists, with representatives for various institutions in Gävle, can serve as an important reference group in this endeavor.

### **C. Municipal Archives and Library in unique collaboration on the city block "Gefle Vapen"**

There are plans for rebuilding and extending the Main Library in Gävle, the municipality's chief library, in 2015. The plans include moving the Municipal Archives to the library and integrating them with the library activity.

The Main Library of Gävle is unique in Europe (together with the Sandviken Public Library in Sweden) in that it is open 365 days a year. It is the community's public space and largest public meeting place, with around 500,000 visitors every year. There is a huge selection of media here and a broad offering of programmed activities. Some special activities are Europa Direkt (EU information), Konsument Gästrikland (consumer information and support), legal counseling and information for newly started businesses. Public appearances by authors, debates and lectures are arranged here. Our libraries are some of the most important resources for working to stimulate lifelong learning.

For many immigrants, a library is the first step into a new society. Here they can keep in touch with the homeland, learn more about the new one, its culture and language. People meet here, across the boundaries of generation, language and culture. It provides the conditions for new and unexpected experiences and encourages curiosity, the joys of creativity and discovery.

As the result of several surveys, we know that the interest in visiting the Municipal Archives is great. The move to the library will make the Archive's collection available in an entirely new and tangible way. The level of service and quality for college students, researchers of local history and genealogists will increase. Today, it's not unusual for archives and library to cooperate. But we want to take it a step further by not only being harbored under the same

roof, but even by having the different occupational groups work side by side, to offer a more qualified service to citizens.

Important target groups are children and youth. Interest in local history is on the rise and the school world is demanding more and more material about Gävle's history. Local history is often a door that leads youngsters into a greater interest for history. The public space offers the prerequisites and opens possibilities to awaken interest and commitment. We offer a meeting place where history, the present and the future tie in together.

### ***Conclusions – the effects of working together***

Where can working together lead us?

The results are many and have varying significance on different levels, for example:

#### **Increased accessibility for our visitors and users**

Giving our staff better knowledge of what the other institutions are doing gives users and visitors a better service. Personnel can give more information, refer to persons in other institutions, which in itself strengthens the reliance and quality in the organizations. When there are common search tools etc, the quality of service increases even more.

#### **Knowledge exchange**

Institutional staff receive knowledge from the other cultural institutions, which yields produces a higher quality service for visitors and users. A continuous cooperation has the effect that our different occupational groups, archivists, librarians and curators, maintain a better insight into each other's professions and therefore a better understanding of our respective tasks.

#### **Professional networks are created**

An important factor that must not be underrated is the proximity of our institutions to each other. Each institution has expert staff, with various experiences. The MLA cooperation creates a natural network and we are never farther away than a walk if we need to meet.

#### **Budget cuts or collaborative gains**

With greater insight into each institution's functions, we see to it that allocated resources are spent on the "right things". The Municipal Archives need not invest in libraries or plan for a complete special subject library, when this is the task of the municipal libraries. The Municipal Archives use their own resources for their own archive activity. Our responsibilities become clearer to everyone and we can become more effective and save tax money. The need for common search systems or coordination around digitisation projects is made possible since the members meet and know what each person works with and they can address common needs.

#### **Digitization projects can create jobs**

What all of us here in Gävle have in common, as well as within our sector, is the demand for information about our files and collections. There is also a demand within archive research that documents should be digitally accessible. We have addressed this reality. Today the institutions can hardly succeed in meeting all of these requests and expectations alone. On the contrary, with the help of various labor market projects, there are opportunities for assistance in some of the tasks and digitization projects. In the long run, easy access to digitized material

will create a greater interest in archive research, and it is most certainly necessary in reaching the goal of being a part of life-long learning.

### **MLA as a part of cultural tourism**

Successful MLA collaboration should show that we are a cultural asset for the tourism trade. Since our institutions are located in Gävle, it is where the visitors come. The more people who come for the purpose of visiting an MLA institution, the more who need to eat, sleep and shop. Till now we have no evaluations or surveys showing if the number of visitors is sufficient to be considered to be of interest to the local economy. Our institutions have naturally many visitors who come from Gävle, but many come from out of town and, for us, this is an interesting aspect. It can show that our institutions have yet another positive effect, thereby making us an asset to the local businesses. Turnover with the tourism trade and commerce generates tax revenue and the proximity of our institutions in Gävle is a part of this. In our regional development plan, the following statement was appropriate:

*“Culture, sports and the many adventures of Gävleborg are resources and hold potential for the future. The sectors are assets, both for the image of Gävleborg that we project and for our own sense of identity and our well-being. They are also very important for the growth of a tourism industry.”*<sup>4</sup>

Our opinion and our conclusion is that, with small means, everyone can get good results. By beginning with small collaborative ventures, we can progress to ever-larger ones and these become natural elements of our daily work.

Translator: Jennifer Hawkins

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<sup>4</sup> “Möjligheter nära dig”- Regional Development Program for Gävleborg, 2009-2013. Regionförbundet Gävleborg