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Limits of flexibility – Case special collections, Tritonia, Finland

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Abstract. Academic libraries have many tasks in common with the universities, among others promoting lifelong learning, interacting with the surrounding society and promoting the social impact of university research findings. In this paper various strategies for how the third task can be implemented into the library activities in Tritonia, a joint academic library for five universities and universities of applied sciences in Vaasa, Finland, are discussed, based on the library's special collections, above all from a collection point of view. The challenges for the academic libraries of the regions are many. Demands are made by outsiders on local preservation of the cultural heritage, prominent persons' private book collections, libraries of learned societies and others. The internal challenges in incorporation of new collections into the library are financing, the physical condition of the collections, lack of space, resources for cataloguing and handling of books. The library faces new demands concerning exhibition spaces and arranging attractive exhibitions. Digitalization and social media give new unforeseen opportunities, but require allocation of resources.

Keywords: academic libraries, cultural heritage, joint libraries, special collections, Finland

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1. Introduction

Academic libraries have many tasks in common with the universities. In Finland, the Universities Act states that the mission of the universities include academic research and higher education, and also *promoting lifelong learning, interacting with the surrounding society and promoting the social impact of university research findings*. This is the societal, so-called third, task of the universities. Academic libraries are open to anyone who wishes to use the collections for studies and research, and thus carry a great role in promoting university cooperation with the surrounding society. What does the third task of

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the university mean to the library and what does it imply from the library's point of view?

The academic libraries are dependent on their universities' success and financial powers. The funding of the universities has changed strongly: state funding has been reduced and university fundraising has grown. The change in the financing model also affects teaching, studying and the societal task of the universities, for which research interests serving the needs for the business community are emphasized. The universities also want their libraries to support these needs. However, the academic libraries have traditionally also carried out the third task of the university as an educational and cultural task: they have preserved and offered access to historically, culturally and regionally interesting documentary heritage.

In this paper various strategies for how the third task can be realized in Tritonia, a joint academic library for five universities and universities of applied sciences in Vaasa, Finland, are discussed, based on the library's special collections (UNESCO Memory of the world, Finland). The challenges for the university libraries of the regions are many. Demands are made by outsiders on local preservation of the cultural heritage in the form of incorporation and preservation of historical school libraries, prominent politicians' or persons' private book collections, libraries of learned societies and others. The internal challenges in incorporation of new collections into the library are financing, the physical condition of the collections, lack of space, resources for cataloguing and handling of books. The library faces new demands concerning exhibition spaces and arranging attractive exhibitions. Digitalization and social media give new unforeseen opportunities, but require allocation of resources. How can the third task of the universities be implemented into the library activities, above all from a collection point of view? In this paper, we search for answers to this question.

2. Background

Academic libraries are not autonomous organizations, but embedded in the ecosystem of their universities and the higher education system in general, and must adjust to their changing requirements and expectations (Machovec 2017, 577). Higher education has changed radically over three decades under the pressures of tightening budgets, the introduction of competitive resource allocation at national and international levels, and the transition of higher education into a mass industry. More output is being called for with fewer resources (Hormia-Poutanen et al. 2011, 600), and concepts of business models like revenue growth, organizational efficiency, and the application of research results in industry have been brought to higher education (Maceviciute 2014, 284). Perceptions on the value of higher education are changing (Machovec 2017, 577) as a part of ongoing legitimacy crisis and fall in popular, ideological,

and economic support for governmental institutions (Tuominen & Saarti 2012, 133; Steane et al. 2015, 264).

Academic libraries face growing challenges from the declining economy, deteriorating administrative support, increasing patron demands and fiscal accountability, as well as the expanding competition from both technology and retail industries (Kaspar & Macmillan 2013, 113). The universal challenge facing all libraries is the digitalization of information and working environment of researchers, teachers and students (Tuominen & Saarti 2012, 132). One of the most radical challenges to libraries in the last two decades is the realization that users no longer come to the libraries. Scholarly communication, collaboration, and research, have moved online, and researchers access databases, articles and books without leaving their offices or homes. (Maceviciute 2014, 291–292.)

In periods of recession, where cutbacks in public funding have increased, complete dependency upon government – or university – funding may cause the downgrading of university library operations. Libraries are not perceived as full-fledged organizations within universities, but they continuously need to prove their value and justify traditional or new investments that are or will be made in them. (Kostagiolas et al. 2013, 268.) Gone is the traditional trust that a library is "universal good" (Muhonen, Nygren & Saarti 2011, 201).

At a time of diminishing resources, academic libraries need to identify ways to cooperate and collaborate in order to use limited resources more effectively. Successful partnerships allow libraries to further their mission, increase their impact, and expand their reach to a broader audience. (Münster 2017, 176.) A shift toward quality, innovation, cooperation, and active participation through a full utilization of library potential will promote their value and increase their negotiating abilities. Thus, libraries will be able to exercise further pressure for additional funding and seek cooperation with other profit and nonprofit agencies, inside and outside of their community. (Kostagiolas et al. 2013, 271–272.)

In an era of value-added services, where libraries need to continue to prove their worth, partnering with internal and external entities to create content is one way for academic libraries to remain relevant to agencies that do not have direct connections to higher education. Joint projects develop a positive relationship with a regional community and more so, benefit partner organizations as they sought to fulfill their missions. (Spring & Marshall 2013, 3.)

The future of higher education rests on our ability to reconceive ourselves holistically, with the various components of scholarly information – discovering, reconstituting, publishing, and sharing knowledge, and keeping its various manifestations securely preserved and accessible – understood as interrelated and interdependent. The next two decades could witness great

activity among universities and colleges focused on repositioning, consolidation, and convergence. Higher education could make enormous contributions ensuring its vitality, expanding its capacity for future discovery and reimagining our cultural heritage without compromising its exactitude and rigor. (Henry & Smith 2013, 82.)

3. Special collections in Tritonia

Tritonia is a joint academic library for five universities and universities of applied sciences located in the city of Vaasa in Finland: the University of Vaasa, VAMK University of Applied Sciences, Novia University of Applied Sciences in Vaasa, Åbo Akademi University in Vaasa and Hanken School of Economics in Vaasa. Tritonia's main task is to serve the research, education and studies of its universities by offering library and information services for the students and staff of five universities, but it is also a public library, open for everyone.

Tritonia offers and acquires diverse printed and electronic collections to support research and education at its universities. The printed collections are available for everyone. When acquiring new material, e-resources are prioritized: when available, e-books and e-journals are acquired. The e-resources licensed to a university are available for the students and staff of that university within the university network and through remote use. Other customers have access to the e-resources in the library premises as walk-in users. Purchase requests can be made by university staff, researchers and students, as well as by other customers. However, priority in acquisition is given to resources requested by teaching staff and of the disciplines taught and studied at the universities.

Therefore, the general collections in Tritonia are divided into six subject collections: business and economics, education, health sciences and psychology, humanities, social sciences, and technology and natural sciences. All textbooks of all disciplines are included in a single textbook collection. In addition to books and journals, Tritonia's general collections contain theses by the students at the universities. However, the most noteworthy part of Tritonia's library collections is its special collections.

Libraries' special collections are often rather small entities, where the connecting factor is usually the provenance (the possession history) of publications. Some of the other connecting factors may be the year of publication, the rareness of the publications, or sometimes the contents of the publications. Typical special collections at university libraries are depository collections; private libraries bought or obtained as donations to be retained as entities; and special collections formed by picking books from the library's own collections. Private library collections are often small and mainly examples of certain library types, such as typical office libraries or parsonage libraries. (Havu 1999 14-15.)

Academic libraries can also form special collections to facilitate the control and to promote a study by picking books separately from the general collection according to certain principles, collections of special collections. The picking can be based on the year of publication, on the rareness of the publications, on the layout of the publications or on the contents more generally. For example, in the National Library of Finland, publications published during Swedish rule in 1488–1809 has been separated as a separate collection. The especially valuable books can be distinguished from the general collection as a separate rarity collection. The most central criteria for the value of the book are the rareness of the book, provenance, in other words possession history, a high-quality illustration, a handmade colouring or another decoration, and especially fine bandage. The valuable special collections are usually available in libraries only by ordering them from a closed stockroom to a special reading room. (Havu 1999 16–17.)

There are several private library collections and subject collections donated to Tritonia by individual persons or institutions. Some of these special collections are freely available in the library and may also be borrowed home. These special collections include:

- Harry Järv's Kafka collection
- Mauri Palomäki's collection
- Ola Leistén's collection
- Bror Pettersson's collection
- MINLANG collection about minority languages
- Finland-Swedish school book collection

Library counsellor *Harry Järv's* (1921–2009) private library containing about 14.000 volumes was bequeathed to Tritonia by Harry and Barbro Järv and was received in 2014. Järv reached an international reputation as a Franz Kafka researcher. He wrote about Kafka's works from the 1950's and collected literature related to Kafka. Järv's Kafka collection contains about 700 titles, of which about 200 are works of fiction by Kafka in different languages, and the other 500 titles research literature and other nonfiction. (Tritonia 2018.)

Professor *Mauri Palomäki's* collection comprises about 1.000 volumes focusing on natural sciences, especially geography, and regional studies. Palomäki donated the collection to Tritonia in 2004. Mauri Palomäki (1931–2009) served as the headmaster of the University of Vaasa in 1970–1989, having an important role in the development of the university. Palomäki has published several works about Finnish regional policy and he has had a remarkable effect on the development of Finnish cultural geography. (Tritonia 2018.)

Ola Leistén's collection is composed of about 2.000 titles in Finnish fiction and biographies. Georg Ola Leistén (1912–1995) was an eager book enthusiast who

collected books his whole life. He often chose his books on the basis of book reviews or acquired classics of guaranteed quality. Leistén was proud of the University of Vaasa and wanted to donate his book collection to the library in 1988–1995. (Tritonia 2018.)

Museum intendant, botanist *Bror Pettersson's* (1895–1992) book collection consists of about 11.000 titles. The collection contains mainly natural science literature from the 1700's to the 1980's, but history, politics and fiction are also included. The collection was donated to the Ostrobothnia Australis association in the early 1990's and is placed in Tritonia. (Tritonia 2018.)

Tritonia owns a wide collection of *Finland-Swedish school books*. The school books are divided into a Finland-Swedish school book collection (books printed after 1960) and a historical school book collection (books printed before 1960). The Finland-Swedish school book collection contains mainly teaching material for Finland-Swedish basic education and upper secondary school. The collection serves the Swedish-speaking teacher training of Åbo Akademi University, but the collection is available for everyone to study and borrow. The collection is based on the constant donations of the Schildts & Söderströms publishing house and it consists of theory books, exercise books, teacher's materials, and textbooks written in plain language donated by the Lärums publishing house. (Tritonia 2018.)

The oldest and/or the most valuable special collections in Tritonia are historical special collections, above all school libraries. These collections are stored in closed premises in Tritonia and may only be studied in Tritonia. These contain:

- The historical Finland-Swedish school book collection
- The Vaasa Girls' School Library
- The Vaasa Lyceum Library
- The Vaasa Swedish Lyceum Library, including Oskar Rancken's collection

The historical school book collection consists of older textbooks (from the middle of the 1800's until the year 1960). The books come from the libraries of Swedish-speaking elementary schools and teacher training institutions (Ekenäs seminary, Nykarleby seminary). The collection also includes private persons' donations. (Tritonia 2018.)

The Vaasa Girls' School Library covers the book collections of the Finnish-speaking girls' school in Vaasa (1891 –1951) and the Finnish-speaking girl lyceum of Vaasa (1951 –1971), altogether about 1700 titles from the teachers' library and from the pupils' library. In the teachers' library, all disciplines are widely represented. Some of the important fields are the school administration, pedagogics, history, social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, and even doctoral theses in medicine and jurisprudence. The historically interesting

material is, among others, the women's magazines of the first decades of the 1900's whereby women's active participation in the social functions was supported. In the pupils' library, more than half of the material is fiction. This collection offers an interesting picture of the girl books of different decades. In the textbooks, the widest field is the Finnish language and Finnish literature. A small part of the textbooks has been meant particularly for girls' schools. The libraries we donated to Tritonia in 2010. (Tritonia 2018.)

The Vaasa Lyceum Library covers the book collections of the Finnish-speaking lyceum in Vaasa (1880–1973) and comprises about 4.200 volumes, 116 magazines and serial publication, maps, illustrated works, and doctoral theses. In the library there are textbooks, general works, and works in theology, philology, history, natural sciences, and fiction in Finnish, Swedish, German, Latin, Greek, English, French, and Russian. The library was donated to Tritonia in 2004. (Tritonia 2018.)

The oldest and most valuable special collection in Tritonia is *the Vaasa Swedish Lyceum Library, including Oskar Rancken's collection*, that gives an overview of literary culture and education in Ostrobothnia during four centuries. Since 2017, the collection is listed in Unesco's national Memory of the World Register, <http://www.maailmanmuisti.fi/p/kotisivu.html> (in Finnish). The collection forms an important cultural-historical heritage as an example of an academic library of its time. The collection comprises two separate parts: the school library and headmaster Oskar Rancken's private library. The Vaasa Swedish Lyceum Library and the Rancken Collection are owned by Åbo Akademi University and kept in Tritonia. The school library comprises 700 shelf metres and includes books from several school libraries:

- Wasa trivialskola (1684–1841)
- Högre elementarskolan i Wasa (1841–1872)
- Wasa gymnasium (1844–1872)
- Elementarläroverket i Wasa (1872–1874)
- Vasa svenska lyceum (1874–1974)

Especially the library of Wasa gymnasium was developed as a matter of common interest for the whole of Ostrobothnia, with the help of fundraising and donations from persons of rank and clergy. In the great fire in Vaasa 1852, a majority of the 7.000 books of the gymnasium was destroyed, but 1.015 items were preserved. The whole region was eager to help building up a new school library, which was based largely on further donations. The Vaasa Swedish Lyceum Library holds valuable literature from a variety of subject fields, mainly classical languages and theology. The oldest books are from the beginning of the 16th century and the collection holds several rare books and unique original editions of older scientific and theological works. (Tritonia 2018.)

4. Collection management of the special collections in Tritonia

The special collections, especially the Vaasa Swedish Lyceum Library, placed in Tritonia form a significant cultural treasure. The Vaasa Swedish Lyceum Library's status in Unesco's national Memory of the World Register shows its eminent cultural-historical value locally, regionally, nationally, and even internationally. It connects Tritonia with its historical background with the city's important schools that laid the foundation of today's digital information landscape.

Though the cultural value of special collections is undisputed, as library materials they are challenging. The most significant expenses at the library are the material, human and space costs (Düren, Landøy & Saarti 2017, 483.) Much room is needed for the storing of wide special collections. The storing of old and valuable collections requires even archive conditions with carefully regulated air humidity. Also, before the library accepts a donation, a laboratory must examine the physical condition of the collection in case of mildew, because mildewed material would endanger all the collections of the library.

Still, even the careful storing of special collections is not enough. Besides storing, the library must make its collections available and bring them into the knowledge of the researchers and of the general public. The best way to make special collections seen and found is to catalogue them into the integrated library system. Addition of special collections to the university's integrated library system, evaluated and cataloged by the library, represents significant and valuable collaboration between the academic library and collection stakeholders (Turner 2017, 58).

However, cataloging old, rare works requires plenty of working hours, expertise, and thus, economic resources. From the university's angle, the most important task of the library is the acquiring and borrowing of the newest research literature. It is difficult to justify the large-scale use of resources to the collection work of the cultural-historical material that does not directly serve education and research of the university. In Tritonia, the special collections have been catalogued within separate projects financed with external funding. There are cultural foundations and associations that subsidize cultural projects. However, external funding must be applied for, and writing applications takes time and effort as well. In Tritonia, it has sometimes been set as a condition that the donor of a collection allocates money for the cataloging of the material donated before the donation is accepted.

New donations and general lack of space force Tritonia to evaluate even its existing special collections. It must be decided whether they can be kept as separate entities or stored at all. Even though the removal of the material from the physical library collections and from the library system requires resources, the costs of storing and maintaining the collections may in the long run exceed

the removal expenses. From the beginning it has undoubtedly been justifiable to accept a certain donated collection, but it might not be expedient to store minor, unimportant special collections, if the library later receives a similar collection of higher value. It must be weighted how many examples of a certain type of libraries are kept. In Tritonia, some former special collections have already been included in the general collections, and at the same time, duplicates and outdated and insignificant publications have been removed from the library collections.

As a public academic library, open for all, Tritonia has many possibilities to make its special collections visible and available for the researchers and devotees of history, literature, and culture. Tritonia needs to allocate reading rooms and exhibition spaces, as well as to arrange attractive exhibitions. Digitalization, the Internet and social media give new unforeseen opportunities, but require allocation of resources. Tritonia presents its special collections online in Finnish, Swedish and English, arranges exhibitions in the library and virtually, and tells about them internally for its universities, for the local community in local newspapers, and for the national and international scientific community in trade and scientific journals. Making special collections visible in Tritonia's Finna portal <https://tritoniam.finna.fi/>, in the national Finna portal <https://www.finna.fi/>, and on the web is a major cultural deed for the research of history and pedagogics in the province of Ostrobothnia, in Finland and abroad.

In honour of the 400th anniversary of Vaasa, a small part of this cultural heritage was digitised. In *Hereditas Culturalis Wasaensis* <https://www.tritoniam.fi/hcw/>, a few works from every century are presented, beginning with the 1600's. The digital collection includes articles and extracts about the history of learning, schools and school libraries, the arrival of the virtual university to Vaasa, and the founding and history of Vaasa. Tritonia seeks project financing opportunities to digitise a larger part of the collections in the future, within a separate digitalisation project, and thereby promoting access to and research of the rarities of the school library collections.

5. Conclusions

Tritonia possesses a significant cultural heritage in historical collections of the Vaasa Swedish Lyceum Library, the Vaasa Lyceum Library, and The Vaasa Girls' School Library. Tritonia aims to continuously give visibility to its historical special collections in order to promote versatile historical research. Tritonia's location close to Åbo Akademi University's Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies make book collections available for educational research and thus contribute to teacher training. As a joint library of five universities in Vaasa, Tritonia, with its historical school library collections, cherishes the history of learning and contributes to the universities' cultural historical task.

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