the group to “best practices” models in Sweden in order “to stimulate ideas about what would work in South of Africa.” The group also had to determine the selection criteria for the second phase of the project. This was the exchange trip to Sweden in 1998 of a group of 18 librarians. The selection criteria for this trip was further debated in South Africa to allow the various provincial education departments to nominate suitable candidates based on their specific needs. The pairing of a media advisor with a librarian from the same school circuit was considered the best option.

In February 1998, five representatives of BiS visited South Africa to interview the 18 applicants and to evaluate the project. In May 1998, the 18 librarians visited Sweden. The LIWO Libraries for Young Learners Project Committee had a tele-conference on 28 May 1998 to discuss the outcome of the recent visit and to plan the way forward.

LIWO is presently in the process of establishing another branch in the Northern Cape Province. I do have a business plan for the Northern Cape Libraries - Upington Region. The Northern Cape Province has the second highest illiteracy rate in South Africa. There is a dire need for financial support to facilitate literacy projects, as well as to purchases library material such as books, videos and CD’s.

Conclusion

LIWO started as an organization with a local touch. This has empowered barefoot library and information workers. The scene has been set for a global reach. The partnership between BiS and LIWO has broadened our understanding and we have learned from each other.

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FROM STUDENT REVOLT TO WORKING LIBRARIANS:
The Formation of BiS, Sweden
by Lennart Wettmark

BiS was founded in 1969 by students of the then-only library school in Sweden, and new members were added each year from new students. A very specific generation was formed in those years and has continued to be the core of BiS. You can actually say that new members and most of all new activists – on the whole – ceased coming in by the end of the 1970s. This might seem like a very sad story and it is to a certain extent. By now we have stopped asking ourselves about the new generation which is supposed to follow. Instead we’re working along on basically the same concept, since that’s the concept which has formed our generation’s intellectual and political life. There has of course been shifts from a more rhetorical to practical approach. After all most of us have by now been working for 25 years in the system.

Socialist Platform

Some people might ask us why we’re labelled “socialist.” This is no longer a big problem. In 1970 it was felt that BiS had become too popular and a big majority felt that BiS should be more politically explicit. BiS accepted a socialist platform. There was a lot of discussion about that decision during the 1970s; some people would rather see a sort of united progressive front using the concept “People.” But we believe that the fact that BiS actually has survived is due to the common ground of socialist values – consciously not very clearly defined, but rather of an ecumenical kind, attracting a wide range of left wing people.

The Transformation of the Library System

The formation of BiS actually took place in a period when the library system in Sweden – probably as elsewhere – was transformed from a rather
closed institution to an open one. BiS’ contribution to it was quite substantial. On the one hand, because of ideas raised by BiS in our journal and as a result of endless weekend meetings. And on the other hand, by more external activities of a very creative and devoted generation of new librarians attracted by the vitality and maybe utopian ideas of BiS. A lot of them gradually left BiS for senior positions in Swedish librarianship.

Our Journal — bis

The base of BiS is our journal. We have by now released about 140 issues subscribed to by Swedish libraries and read by people interested in library matters — not necessarily people working in libraries. bis is our face to the world. For a long period editorial work on issues of bis was shared among the geographically scattered branches of BiS. Editors’ work included ideological considerations, planning, contacts and the responsibility – and privilege – of delivering a camera-ready galley to the printing office. With a reduced number of activists and desktop publishing, producing bis has become more centralised, which is a pity, but for the moment a necessity.

There is an index of bis for the period 1969-90, which reveals the profile of BiS during our first 20 years. During the first ten years, articles on children, the workplace, union issues, conditions in the library, and acquisition policy were more dominant than during the ten years to follow. During the 1980s, we published more articles on the objectives of libraries and outreach programs. BiS committed itself especially to changes in the areas of children’s librarianship and service to immigrants and workers. In addition, the importance of branch libraries as opposed to the dominance of the main library was stressed. I could go on mentioning other areas, but I think we actually share these ideas and concerns with progressive librarians all over the world. I believe we have very much identified with the concept of “community library” in our activities.

The 1980s

The 1980s saw a strong paradigmatic shift in librarianship, which was probably a universal experience. And that shift was too strong for BiS to fully resist. We made attempts to oppose the shift to individually fixed salaries. We basically failed. But the idea of contracting-out libraries failed too. Not thanks to us, but rather to the vigilant and powerful resistance of the Swedish Writer’s Union. The idea of introducing fees also failed and is now prohibited by the library law of 1996.

South Africa

During the 1990s BiS has put a lot of effort into supporting the development of libraries in South Africa. We have been involved in two different projects. The oldest is the Masizame Community Project in the township of Lingelihle in the Eastern Cape province. We started raising money in 1991 and have so far transferred about $35,000 of which about $10,000 has been raised through members’ donations and the rest through fundraising. This grassroots project has faced a lot of problems and there has been a lot of discussion between BiS and Masizame, but the fact is that a well equipped resource center has been established.

Our other great commitment in South Africa is our link to LIWO. Despite the fact that BiS is a small organisation the Swedish International Development Aid Agency (Sida) has been very confident in our contacts in South Africa. So, to much surprise, two small library organisations in Sweden and South Africa have been planning and are working on a project of stimulating development of library resources to schools throughout the nine provinces. After the start of the project National Department of Education has been involved too. In short, our approach is to invest in human resources through study visits and seminars in Sweden by key persons. The idea is of course not to copy Sweden, but to start a process in which several school library plans will be created to reflect a wide range of models. One starting point is to help implement the excellent South African School Library Plan issued by the National Department, and very much the work of Jenni Karlsson, LIWO activist and member of the LIWO working group project.

SAB

BiS is a very small organisation. Twenty years ago there was about 400 registered members in BiS. Now we are 140 (all paying members!). We have a fundamental lack of funds. When we have put aside money for our low budget journal, practically nothing is left. We have a wealthier big sister SAB – the corresponding organisation to ALA. During the 1990’s we
have had a fairly cordial relationship, realizing that we actually are on the same side in the defence of what libraries actually have achieved. Two of our activists have received high awards, SAB has issued a book with articles written by one of our ideologists, Ingrid Atlestam, and illustrated by one of our cartoonists, Ulf Larson. We would never be able to afford such a thing. We sent the secretary general of SAB to South Africa to talk about combined libraries at a school library conference that was funded by Sida. Until last year, SAB’s chairperson was actually a member of BiS. And, in the last issue of *bis* for 1997 we published a satirical (and maybe not very witty) article rejected by the editors of SAB’s journal on a very important issue: the sale by SAB of the majority shares of the dominant library vendor and service company in Sweden. SAB’s chairperson was the target of the article. The fact that she hasn’t renewed her membership in BiS might have something to do with the article. I’ll ask her some day.

*Fair Libraries?*

Do we put all our efforts in South Africa? I believe some members think so, but we do try to influence the Swedish library scene as well. Keywords are equity and fairness in the rapid development of the library system.

Could it be possible to make an annual award for the Fair Library of Sweden? This is what we have been talking about in the last year. We have had a seminar on it, we have written a manifesto and we’re working on a sort of elector’s system. We have plans of trying to involve one of the successful progressive publishing companies and the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions which has been researching and campaigning on the increasing social gaps in Sweden during the 1990s. The idea is, of course, to focus on the ideological basis of Swedish libraries. By raising the question we also hope to increase the interest of looking at libraries not as a market-oriented kind of shop, but as a social and democratic resource.

And this is what social responsibility in libraries is all about isn’t it?