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Social indexing at the Stockholm public library

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Introduction

The Stockholm public library launched a new web 2.0 website in February 2008, Biblioteket.se (<http://www.biblioteket.se>), with an integrated OPAC. At the website, it is possible for users to set tags, ratings on and reviews of a book, film etc. Biblioteket.se was available as a beta-version from February 2007, but at that time, it was only possible for staff and for invited “beta-testers” to log into the website and create tags. Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about social indexing in library catalogues, but not many research reports. In this paper I would like to find out more about tagging at Biblioteket.se.

Method

For each tag, I have obtained information about when the tag was first set and how many times it has been used. Information about who has set the tags is only possible to get by searching Biblioteket.se and stumble upon a user via the function for reviews. A user visible at Biblioteket.se has an alias and is anonymous. At the user’s site at Biblioteket.se I can see if the user has tagged any books.

The screenshot shows a user profile for 'Cleverly Klipsk' on the Biblioteket.se website. The profile includes a 5-star rating for 'Cleverly Klipsks betyg' and a list of tags under 'Cleverly Klipsks etiketter'. The first tag is 'Och himlens vida väv' by Hearn, Lian, with a rating of 5(5.0). A red circle highlights the 'Cleverly Klipsks etiketter' section. A blue callout box on the right says 'Hjälp oss att göra webben bättre!'.

“Etiketter” is the Swedish word for tags. “Cleverly Klipsks etiketter” shows the tags set by the user Cleverly Klipsk.

The date set for the review tells me something about the user. Prior to 2008-02-15, tags were set only by librarians,¹ after that date it could be a librarian or a non-librarian.

I have studied all tags to see if they are private or reflect personal opinions and I have also compared them to the rules for setting subject headings, but I have not actually compared each one of them with the subject headings used in our catalogue.

I have studied the 66 tags that have been used more than 10 times. I have

- compared the tags to subject headings for fiction and non-fiction
- looked at what kind of books and other media the tag is used for
- tried to determine whether it was set by librarians or non-librarians

I also wanted to know more about why people tag. For this, I have set up two focus groups with teenagers, I have advertised at the website for views on tagging, e-mailed staff at the Stockholm public library and asked a small group of people to tag.

Tagging at Biblioteket.se

To be able to tag users need to log in to the website. When doing this for the first time they will have to agree to certain rules and create an alias. This is to avoid abuse. There is also a possibility for other users to report abuse. For example, bad language can cause a user to be banned from further use. So far this has been successful – we have not had any problems with abusive language etc.

Tags are separated by space and can only consist of one word. To form a multi word tag, you have to write e.g. Las_Vegas, LasVegas or Las-Vegas.

Tagging is not very visible on the start page, but most searches on Biblioteket.se are made on Google for specific books or subjects. Then you would come directly to a view that encourages tagging.

Search on Google for “Flyga drake recension” (Hit number 7 in a search performed 2009-06-29)

The screenshot shows the Biblioteket.se website interface. The main content area displays the book 'Flyga drake : en skakande berättelse om en pojke från Afghanistan' by Khaled Hosseini. The page includes a search bar at the top, a navigation menu, and a sidebar with 'Finns som:' (Bok, tidning, tidskrift (1), Talbok, Daisy (2), Ljudbok, CD (1)). The book details section shows the author, title, category, publisher, and language. A red circle highlights the 'Användarnas etiketter' (User tags) section, which lists: 1. barndom (2), 2. favorit (2), 3. afghanistan (1), 4. Bör-läsas (1). Below this is the 'Mina etiketter' (My tags) section, which is currently empty and prompts the user to log in to set their own tags. A blue speech bubble on the right says 'Hjälp oss att göra webben bättre!' (Help us make the web better!).

After logging in you can start setting tags (Etiketter in Swedish)

There is information about how to tag from the “Skriv och tyck” (Write your opinion) page but the information is not easily available from the page above.

The tags can be searched by a special search interface or by browsing the most used tags. It is not possible to combine searches for tags with information from the bibliographic record. We do not use a tag cloud.

Subject headings

The subject headings are quite hidden at Biblioteket.se. Users will have to click on “More information” about a book etc. to see the subject headings and not all of the subject headings are clickable for further searches. Since the subject headings are so hidden, I have not found it interesting to compare subject headings to tags set for a specific title. I have compared tags to the subject headings but not at the record level.

The Stockholm public library has used subject headings for non-fiction according to the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) since 1932. We also set subject headings for fiction since about 1990. There are also subject headings generated from the classification system for non-fiction and additional subject headings for fiction supplied by a vendor. This makes some records overloaded with subject headings. To help users search by subject is an important task for a library and we plan to improve this, but so far, we have not managed to do so.

The tags

2006 -2007	1221
2008	+602
2009 Jan. – June, 15	+316
Total no. tags	2139

Tagging has been available for 2 1/2 years for librarians. From 2006-12-18 – 2008-02-15 only librarians could tag. Tagging was also one of the tasks in our “23 things project” (November 2007). 152 people completed the tagging thing / task. At least 1272 tags have been set by librarians, i.e. more than 60 % of the tags. From 2008-02-15 all users with a library card and a PIN-code have been able to set tags.

The Umeå district library has 4300 unique tags. They have not studied the tags, but know that a single librarian has been very active as a tagger.² Umeå is the only other library in Sweden that allows users to set tags, but many libraries are planning to replace their old OPACs with new library 2.0 style websites.

The Ann Arbor district library has 22000 unique tags used on 11000 titles and set by 537 different users. The possibility to tag has been there for 2 1/2 years. Around 5 % of the records have tags and less than 1 % of the users have set tags.³

The Stockholm public library has 625 000 bibliographic records and 200 000 active users, 165 000 if children and elderly people are not included. It is not possible to get information about how many of the records that have been tagged, nor how many different users that tag.

1 % of the active users setting tags (1650) may be an achievable goal for the future, but I estimate that there are around 200 at the moment, 0.1 %.

All tags

All 2139 tags have been studied and classed as ⁴

- Private tags, e.g. “To_read”
- Tags reflecting personal opinions, e.g. “Smashing”
- Subject tags

All tags	Private	Reflect opinions	Subjects
2139	92	128	1919
100 %	4.3 %	6.0 %	89.9 %

Most tags reflect subjects and are not for private use or personal opinions. This is a bit surprising, but may be due to the large number of librarians among the taggers. It may also be because the users do not know how to use tags for private purposes. Among the tags set by known non-librarians, 9.9 % reflected opinions and no tags were for private use.

While looking at lists of the tags I found that many of the tags dealt with geography, genre or prizes and awards and I chose to study them.

Subject tags	Genre	Geography	Prizes and awards	Other
1919	106	152	32	1633
100 %	5.5 %	10.8 %	1.7 %	82 %

334 tags, or 17.3 % of the subject tags, have a grammatical form that differs from the rules for subject headings. For librarians these rules are natural, but for non-librarians they are not evident.

- 62.9 % are nouns in the singular form, “dog”, instead of “dogs”. For example, in the Swedish encyclopedia Nationalencyklopedin you have to search for “hund” (dog). Though librarians do know the subject heading should be “dogs” they may chose to set “dog” to make it easier for non-librarians to search. An example of this is a

librarian who has set both the singular and the plural form of an animal to enhance searches.

- 12.3 % are adjectives like “våldsam” (Violent).
- 24.8 % have other differences. “Köpa”_hus instead of Husköp (buy_house instead House buying), “medeltid” instead of Medeltiden (Middle age instead of The Middle ages).

It seems likely that more tags would have a form different to the subject headings if there were more non-librarian taggers. Among the non-librarians, 25.4 % of the subject tags have a different grammatical form.

The most popular tags

The most popular tags are:

Usage	Tag
145	Öknar - Deserts
137	klassiker
87	fantasy
65	Origami
55	Bör-läsas – Should be read
48	humor
47	kärlek – Love
46	Hugo-vinnare – A literary prize
42	provläs – Read to see if you like it
40	Krig - War
39	Relationer

I have studied the 66 tags that have been used more than 10 times. The tags were set for fiction, non-fiction, films and music.

Fiction	Non-fiction	Film	Music
41	33	19	5
62%	50%	29%	7.6%

I have compared the 56 tags that are not for private use or that reflect personal opinions, to the subject headings for fiction for children and grown ups and for non-fiction.

Identical	Almost identical	More specific	More common	Different
29	6	7	11	3
51.8%	10.7	12.5	37.9	5.4

Many of the tags are identical to the subject headings. The “Almost identical” differ in grammatical form or use a slightly different word.

The use of “More common” words is e.g. “Queer” instead of Queertheory, “usa” instead of The United States of America, “Progg” (a Swedish radical music movement in the 1970’s)

instead of Musikrörelsen.

“More specific” tags are set for literary prizes, more specific genre like Feministic SF, etc.

The tags that are “Different” are:

- “activities_with_children” - a very useful tag for parents,
- “Children_in_danger”. The subjects headings for these books are Childabuse, Bullying, Honor killings, Immigrant girls. “Children_in_danger” sets focus on the child and is a good way of finding all books on this subject.
- “Alternative_history”.

Tags for multi word and phrases

Many users want to form multi word tags or phrases and do so with a hyphen, underscore etc. Quite often they fail and create separate tags instead. E.g. “Att bli frisk” (To become well) is set as three tags “att”, “bli” and “frisk”. If it would be possible to form multi word tags the number of unique tags would decrease. It would make it easier to avoid forming meaningless tags like “att” (to). Name for a town like Las Vegas would also most likely always get the tag “Las Vegas” instead of several variations.

Users – librarians and non-librarians

It has proved very difficult to make certain who have set a tag. I have found only 22 people that are non-librarian users. In addition I have studied the tags set by the 5 non-librarians that I have asked to tag. Both groups have set more tags that reflect personal opinions, 6.0 % of all tags and 9.9 % of tags set by the 27 non-librarians. The subject tags also differ more often in grammatical form, 17.3 % of all tags and 25.4 % of tags set by non-librarians.

It would be very interesting to perform a larger test with non-librarians. I have tried to make users contact me, but this has proven difficult.

Why people tag and why they do not

Most non-librarian users at Biblioteket.se do not tag even if they write reviews and give ratings. It is not uncommon to have rated 50, 70 or even 120 books without tagging any of them. Tagging does not seem to be the most popular way to participate at Biblioteket.se, so what do people think about tags?⁵

I have set up two focus groups consisting of teenagers that normally meet at the library.⁶

A) Players of role-playing games (4 persons, 15-20 years old)

B) Players of other games (5 persons, all 17 years old)

They all use the library, but only use the website if they really wanted a particular title. Both groups were sceptical to user supplied information like reviews and ratings. They held the opinion that only persons that really liked something would be prone to give ratings and reviews. Many reviews were not very interesting because they were short and only stated e.g. “This is a wonderful book!” They also said that it was difficult to know if you liked the same books and preferred having reading advice from friends, or to browse the library shelves.

Both groups preferred the professional librarian reviews to user supplied reviews and wanted descriptions of books, not simple recommendations.

They did not search the catalogue for fiction by subject. They did search for non-fiction by subject if they needed something for schoolwork and could see the point of subject headings. Since they rarely searched by subject, it is not surprising that they did not really see the value of tags in the library catalogue. None of them had tagged before.

A boy in group B thought that you need to be committed in order to start writing reviews, tags and grades. If you belong to a social community on the web you would feel obliged to participate. He also pointed out that there is a difference between rating books and rating music on the web since books take much longer time to read. To listen to music at Last.fm and tag it after listening to it is quite easy and does not require much time. The others agreed.

At Biblioteket.se it is possible to contact other users and to discuss books but it is not a social community on the web. The Umeå district library started their website Mina bibliotek (My libraries – <http://www.minabibliotek.se>) in 2007 with a social community but few people used the community part of the website. Social communities vary in popularity. In Sweden Lunarstorm was very popular with teenagers for several years, but now many use Facebook instead. I think it would be a good idea to make it easier for users to communicate about books, e.g. by virtual book-circles, and to find new friends at Biblioteket.se, but that a full social community has a small chance to become popular and well used.

No users have contacted me on behalf of the advertisement on the web. The advertisement has been on the start page of Biblioteket.se and on “Skriv och tyck” (Write your opinion) since the middle of May.

I have asked 8 non-librarians to tag about 10-20 tags (A-H) ⁷. Only 5 of them did. A reviewed books instead and told me it was impossible to set tags. She needed more words to express herself. B and C did not set tags though they were reminded several times. B (male 19 years old) told me it was too much work and C (woman 20 years old) told me too late that she did not understand what to do. Most of the five persons that did tag found it difficult but interesting and none would have done it if they had not been asked to do so. D (male 22 years) set 30 tags and found it quite easy. E. set only 3 tags (Fantasy, Drugs, Trögläst - Slow-to-read) and told me it was too difficult.

D thought that there are too few tags at the website and that discourages people to set tags. He also wanted to be able to form expressions and not only unique words. He formed phrases like ”svår_att_lägga_ned” (difficult_to_put_down) and “växa_opp” (grow_up). F. liked setting tags, but thought that it would be better if there were some instructions. She obviously did not find the instruction available at the website.

I have also discussed tags with other non-librarians. Many of them did not want to set tags and did not understand how tags could be useful. I have come to the conclusion that all users do not want to classify their reading.

Why do librarians tag? Librarians are generally very interested in searching the catalogue in various ways. Most of the librarians do not set subject headings, but setting tags may be interesting even for those who set subject headings. One librarian stated that with subject heading you have rules to follow, but you can express anything with tags - your feelings and

opinions about the book, trivia about the book or the author outside the book itself, private stuff etc.

Öppna bibliotek (Open libraries)

The Stockholm public library is in charge of a project on how to share added values to the bibliographic record by creating API's, Öppna bibliotek (<http://www.oppnabibliotek.se>). The first part of the project makes it possible to share reviews by librarians. Öppna bibliotek makes it possible to use the librarian reviews from another collaborating project called Boktips.net (<http://www.boktips.net/>) at your own website.

The next part of the project, not yet released, is to make it possible to share user supplied content, including tags. Since very few users set tags this is something that most libraries want to share. There is a common belief that more tags will generate more tags.

The project Öppna bibliotek is also interesting because it is a project with cooperation between public libraries, university libraries and Libris, the Swedish union catalogue for university and scientific libraries. Today all kinds of libraries are interested in adopting the library 2.0 concept.

Jönköping university library has implemented the API's from Öppna bibliotek (<http://julia.hj.se>)

The screenshot shows a library catalog entry for the book "Drakens vrede" by Adam Blade. The page includes a sidebar with navigation links, a book cover, and a table of exemplar information. A red circle highlights a review from Boktips.net.

Drakens vrede / Adam Blade ; från engelskan av Carla Wiberg

Blade, Adam
Wiberg, Carla, 1950-
Tucker, Ezra
Stockholm : Bergh, 2008
113, [13] s. : ill. ;
978-91-502-1716-2(inb.)
Beast Quest ; 1
Illustrationer av Ezra Tucker
Första svenska upplaga 2008
Fantasy Barnböcker

Lånestatus	Samling/Hylla	Lånevillkor	Streckkod
Ej utlånad Reservera	Barnböcker Hcf BLAD	Hemlån	11577000267139

◀ Föregående post Nästa post ▶
Fullpost | MARC

Boktips.net
Den onde trollkarlen Malvel har uttalat en hemsk förbannelse. I stället för att som tidigare skydda kungariket Avantien ska sex vidunder nu förgöra landet. Det brinner i vissa områden, i andra är det svåra snöstormar, och på annat håll är det snart brist på dricksvatten. Allt elände beror på odjurens härjningar. Tom skickas till kungen för att skaffa hjälp till sin by. Han lyckas ta sig in i slottet och får träffa kungen. Det visar sig att kungen kände Toms pappa som var en mycket modig man. Kungen tror att Tom kan rädda Avantien från förbannelsen. Han ber Tom om hjälp att lösa upp halsbandet runt draken Fernos hals. Lyckas Tom med det är drakens förbannelse hävd. Det är första delen i serien Beast quest. Tom måste också försöka besegra en sjöorm, en jätte, en kentaur, ett snömonster och en eldfågel innan allt är som förut i Avantien.
Camilla Vesterlund, Västerås stadsbibliotek
Texten kommer från Öppna Bibliotek.

Future improvements

The most important thing to improve is to separate tags with something else than a space in order to enable forming multi word tags and phrases. Many users try to form phrases and not all concepts can be expressed by a single word.

Help when forming tags would also be good for consistency. If I started writing in “andra värld” it would be helpful getting the pop-up suggestion “Andra världskriget” (The second world war). This would help avoiding misspellings and other variations.

The tags and the possibility to tag should become more visible and more tempting at Biblioteket.se. A tag cloud looks nice, but as the majority of tags are used only once, it must be combined with other ways of browsing the tags. From “My loans” at “My page” at Biblioteket.se you are encouraged to create reviews and give ratings, but not to set tags. At LibraryThing tags, rates and comments are equally emphasised.⁸

Making it easier for users to use the bibliographic records and other information for other purposes and to share with others at well-known social communities or social bookmarking sites may also be of importance for using the catalogue in new ways. This may encourage tagging.⁹

Sharing tags with other libraries will be a good thing. Together with The Umeå district library we will have 6400 tags and with more libraries joining Öppna bibliotek there will be even more. Many of the tags will be set for the same titles, but there is also hope of getting tags for less popular books. A good example of this is the fact that “Öknar” (Deserts) is the most used tag at Biblioteket.se and it is set by a single user who takes a great interest in the subject.

A better administrative tool for studying tags is also important.

Conclusion

This report can only give indications on the use of tagging in our catalogue. I would like to find out more about why users tag and a more thorough study of the tags would give more information about the way they tag.

More than 60 % of the unique tags have been set by librarians. It has proved difficult to find non-librarian taggers and I have not been able to answer the question if non-librarians would choose different words compared to our subject headings. I have found that 51.8 % of the 66 most popular tags correspond to the subject headings and that only 17.3 % of all tags have a grammatical form that differs from the subject headings but 25.4 % of the tags set by non-librarian users.

Very few users set tags. They are more likely to review and rate books etc. Discussions with users imply that this may be because tagging is found more difficult. A more thorough research is needed with more users. Since I have only interviewed a few users, I do not know if this is generally valid for all users. That they do not tag may also be because many users do not search for fiction by subject. They find fiction in other ways than searching a library catalogue. The teenagers in the focus groups preferred the professional subject headings to user set tags.

I still think that the possibility to tag is a valuable feature in library catalogues. People are different and the library should offer different ways for them to participate at the website. Even if less than 0.5 % of our users tag and a few more users find other user tags interesting that is enough. I do not see a problem with tags being private and not reflecting the subject of the book. More tags could be private and of use for only the person setting the tag as long as

the tags are not mixed with the subject headings. At Biblioteket.se only 10.1 % of the tags are private or reflect personal opinions.

Subject headings are still important for searching by subject. Tags are not consistent enough for making a good basis for further searches by subject. But we need to use the subject headings in better ways to help users find media by subject.

Searching tags can be helpful, e.g. when searches by subject do not give results and browsing tags can help finding interesting books, but most of all, tags are useful for the person setting them.

Notes

¹ I use “librarians” for all employees at the Stockholm public library for practical reasons, not only for trained librarians. “Non-librarians” are users not working at the library.

² E-mail from Jenny Eklund dated 2009-05-26

³ E-mail from Eli Neuburger dated 2009-07

⁴ I have also been inspired by the articles by Spiteri (2008) and Mendes (2009) in classing the tags.

⁵ Ding et al. (2009) have studied tagging in Delicious, Flickr and YouTube and find that tagging at Flickr and YouTube are done by few users. At YouTube “the role of tagging is overshadowed by rating and commenting” (p 12). The same goes for tagging at Biblioteket.se, tagging is not as popular as giving reviews and ratings.

⁶ The focus groups were both set up at the branch library Medborgarplatsen at 2009-05-13. I would have preferred having more focus groups, but there was not enough time to do so.

⁷ They were expected to tag 10-20 tags and to talk to me afterwards about tagging. I did not want to tell them how to tag, but since they did not really know what to do I told them that tags could reflect the subject, give an opinion or be of private use.

⁸ Sinclair and Cardew-Hall (2008) have done an interesting comparison of the use of a tag cloud and a search box as a search interface.

⁹ This is pointed out by Gazan (2008).

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