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# Navigating exceptionalism: the role of public libraries in times of crisis and war rhetoric

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This article presents the first results from the *LibPrepare* research project, which explores how the democratic mission of public libraries is understood, imagined and potentially compromised in times of crisis and war rhetoric. The aim is to gain knowledge of the mechanisms, motives and potential implications of enrolling libraries in Swedish national security policy.

**Method.** A thematic text analysis is conducted of three sets of policy texts from national government, national library and professional development sources, reviewing libraries' roles and obligations in times of crisis and war rhetoric.

**Analysis.** The concepts of new public governance, governmentality and exceptionalism are used to explore how public library actors articulate their role in the emerging politics of emergency preparedness.

**Results.** The library sector in Sweden is not identified as a prominent or leading actor in crisis preparedness by the Swedish civil contingencies agency. However, key library actors argue that libraries should be included in and take responsibility for societal crises and war preparedness.

**Conclusion.** The analysis shows how key library actors argue that libraries could, and presumably therefore should, take responsibility for preparing the Swedish population for crises and war. Thereby, they argue for libraries to self-govern and actively be part of the civil defence in a perceived state of exceptionalism. Such acts of responsabilisation may strengthen the legitimacy of libraries in relation to government and governing agencies. However, if libraries become megaphones for public information and promoters of information control, these acts may prove to work in the opposite direction with regard to library users.

## Introduction

In this paper we present the first results from the *LibPrepare* research project, which explores how the democratic mission of public libraries is understood, imagined and potentially compromised in times of crisis and war rhetoric. Recent events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and a growing awareness of the consequences of climate change has brought on a state of emergency in the Swedish crisis management system. Questions regarding crisis preparedness are being brought to the forefront and extensive measures are being taken to make society and its residents prepared for crisis and war. A notable effort is the reconstruction of civil defence, which involves reconceptualisations and implementations of new ideas and visions regarding the organisation and distribution of roles and responsibilities among different actors and sectors of society. The cultural sector, including public libraries, forms part of these discussions and culture is increasingly presented as a significant factor in bolstering the willingness of the Swedish population to defend their country. Considered to be of equal importance is the promotion of information literacy to enable the population's resistance to malign information activities.

Following these arguments, positioning libraries within the framework of civil defence may appear to be a straightforward and pragmatic solution. As publicly funded institutions with a significant presence in local communities, public libraries can play a pivotal role for community building and information provision during times of crisis. However, enrolling libraries in national security policy also invokes questions regarding the potential implications for the societal role of libraries. The envisioning of new obligations in the crisis and war rhetoric tends to renegotiate the balance of responsibilities between the state, the individual and civil society. Furthermore, tensions are conveyed in these new political currents, infused by preparedness for war, that may present a challenge to libraries' democratic mission.

In this paper, we address such renegotiations and tensions by critically exploring how the role of public libraries in preparedness is framed by different actors in Swedish crisis and war rhetoric. To further our understanding of the rationales behind the arguments made, we situate the Swedish politics of crisis and war preparedness in the prevailing paradigm of public administration and governance commonly referred to as new public governance (Osborne, 2006; Kann-Rasmussen, 2024). We also deploy theoretical concepts from governmentality studies to further the analysis of the logics of governing at play. By elucidating different understandings and expressions of public libraries' responsibilities in civil defence, the aim is to gain knowledge of the mechanisms, motives and potential implications of enrolling libraries in national security policy.

The paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How is the societal challenge of crisis and war preparedness framed, and how does the library sector in Sweden engage with this framing?
- How can the library sector's involvement in civil preparedness be understood against the backdrop of contemporary logics of public governance, and what are the potential implications of this involvement?

We will now outline previous research to situate this study in a broader scientific context of investigations into different aspects of preparedness. Thereafter we present the theoretical framework, including the concepts of new public governance, responsabilisation and exceptionalism, and our methodology. The analysis that follows consists of two themes: '(Re)framing the wicked problem' and 'Assuming responsibility for crisis preparedness'. Lastly, in the concluding section, we summarise our results.

## Previous research

The explicit crisis and war rhetoric, as well as the following attempts to enrol public libraries in national security policy and crisis preparedness, is a novel phenomenon in the post-cold war era, at least in the context of many western countries like Sweden. From this follows the fact that the issue has gained only limited scholarly attention. There is a growing body of research addressing the role of *culture* in preparedness, primarily focusing on the protection of cultural heritage (e.g. Duh et al., 2022; McWilliams and Olsson, 2024). There is also research that critically investigates the current state and perception of crisis and war preparedness (see e.g. Wither, 2020), as well as historical experiences of this situation (Cronqvist et al., 2022; Rossbach, 2017). A vast number of studies in library and information science explore different facets of recent crises, such as, for example, the deepening climate crisis, natural disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic and the spreading of false information enhanced with AI (see e.g. Brobst et al., 2011; Doudaki and Carpentier, 2023; Intahchomphoo and Vellino, 2024; Haider and Sundin, 2022; Silvast et al., 2021; Sparf et al., 2022; Hicks and Lloyd, 2024). Often, these studies address a particular crisis and its implications, and they do not discuss the role of libraries in the context of war. However, reoccurring crises, including a presumed potentiality of war, co-construct a certain state of preparedness. The present study seeks to explore the issues and dilemmas that arise in this situation.

Additionally, the study builds upon existing research that explores public libraries as promoters of democracy, community engagement, civil society and informed citizenry. Previous research has sought to define the democratic mission of public libraries (e.g. Buschman, 2023; Audunson et al., 2020) and explore how this mission may be challenged by societal and political change (e.g. Kann-Christensen and Andersen, 2009; Olsson Dahlquist, 2019; Carlsson et al., 2022; Engström, 2022; Carlsson et al., 2023). The social role of public libraries in the local community (Hansson, 2019; Klinenberg, 2018), and its potential to form a public sphere promoting civic engagement, has been noted in research (Koizumi and Larsen, 2023; Appleton and Hall, 2023). In this paper, we also explore how this role and the responsibilities of public libraries may be subject to negotiations and change in the wake of increased crisis preparedness and the rebuilding of civil defence structures.

Of particular interest for this study is the rich body of research that has examined the instrumentality, contemporary roles and legitimacy of the public library institution (e.g. Kann-Rasmussen, 2024; Larsen et al., 2023; Hvenegaard Rasmussen et al., 2022). How the legitimacy of public institutions is framed, and how these institutions seek justification for their work and position in society, is connected to different understandings of public value and how such value is produced. Hence, research in library and information science (e.g. Buschman, 2003; Andersen and Kann-Rasmussen, 2009; Kann-Rasmussen, 2024) has investigated the consequences of different forms of governance for library practice and legitimacy work. This research forms part of the analytical toolkit of this study, presented in the next section.

## Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the introduction, we seek to understand the logics and mechanism of the current trends in Swedish crisis and defence policies against the backdrop of emerging paradigms in public administration and governance, referred to as new public governance (NPG). NPG is an umbrella term for capturing the *'interactive, interorganizational, and indirect forms of governing'* (Torfing and Triantafillou, 2013, p. 10), that many western countries are currently moving towards. Proponents of NPG underscore the importance of collaboration and innovation, arguing that societal challenges can only be effectively addressed through the engagement of multiple actors, including the private sector, civil society and, importantly, citizens (Kann-Rasmussen, 2024). Although NPG is foremost a descriptive rather than an analytical concept, it serves to explain and provide relevant context for making sense of the rationales and directions in public policy analysed

in this paper. As argued by Kann-Rasmussen (2024), NPG stresses the demands of public institutions to contribute to solving societal problems and to ‘do good’, tasks that are difficult to question and easily incorporated and taken on. Hence, NPG effectively masks the instrumentality of policy decisions and reinforces a notion of governance as involving regulation or self-regulation (Torfing and Triantafillou, 2013). Consequently, public institutions, such as libraries, to a larger extent take on responsibility for solving societal problems, often so-called *wicked problems*, without specific policy directions or decisions, as a form of ‘instrumentality from below’ (Kann-Rasmussen, 2024, p. 592).

*Wicked problems* usually refer to complex, non-linear problems that are challenging to resolve because of their cross-sectoral nature, their tendency to transcend professional boundaries and their resistance to clear, unambiguous definition (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Kann-Rasmussen, 2024). The term is somewhat ambiguous, and researchers use it both analytically and rhetorically (Lönngren and van Poeck, 2021). In this paper it is used as a sensitising concept, to explore and elucidate how the problem that libraries are expected to address is conceptualised.

To analytically address the issue of governance without governing, we use the concept of *responsibilisation* from governmentality studies (e.g. Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999). *Responsibilisation* refers to the process by which responsibilities shift from the state to individuals or communities (Larsson, 2021; Rose, 1999). We utilise this concept to discuss the broader distribution of responsibilities from the state to other actors, as assumed by the politics of preparedness. Additionally, we explore the role that libraries are assigned and take on in promoting these politics. Furthermore, we incorporate the concept of *exceptionalism*, which refers to the perception of the current situation as extraordinary, thereby justifying extraordinary measures (Rådestad and Larsson, 2018). *Exceptionalism* is used to contextualise the discourse on new roles and responsibilities assigned to and adopted by libraries within a specific political framework.

## Methodology

In their examination of the current state of exceptionalism in the Swedish crisis management system, Rådestad and Larsson (2018, p. 5) argue that the end of the Cold War, along with the September 11 attacks in the United States, has led to a security perspective focused on safeguarding critical societal functions. The texts selected for analysis in this study can be seen as manifestations of this turn in domestic security policy. They share a common objective: to delineate or respond to ideas about which functions should be considered essential to society during times of crisis. Consequently, they illustrate how roles and obligations in times of crisis and war rhetoric are envisioned by principal actors in this study. Below, we describe these three selected sets of texts and how we conducted the analysis.

The first text, *The list of important societal functions*, is compiled and published by the Swedish civil contingencies agency (MSB). This list plays a crucial role in governing public institutions, such as public libraries, during emergencies. A notable example of its significance is the role it played during the Covid-19 pandemic. The list published in 2021 identifies functions deemed essential for society, shaping both the roles these functions assumed and the expectations placed upon them. As a result, guardians employed in roles classified as essential were guaranteed access to childcare services, even when such services were unavailable to the general public. During this period, the debate over whether libraries should be included as an essential societal function gained increased attention (Gammel, 2021). The list of important functions was updated in 2023, is broad in scope and covers fourteen areas with fifty-nine identified societal functions. Each function is briefly described in the list, with examples of actors considered important for the function (MSB, 2023).

The second text analysed is the *Consultation response* from the national library of Sweden (KB) to the mentioned list of important societal functions. The consultation response replies to the updated list of 2023 and comments on five of the areas, relating to six of the identified functions.

The third set of texts is retrieved from Digiteket, which is an online platform for professional development and learning, aimed at library staff in Sweden. It is operated by an editorial team at the Malmö city library on behalf of the national library in Sweden and the Swedish arts council. The material on Digiteket is published as courses, articles and other forms of resources such as videos. The material is sorted under different themes. Our analysis focus on the theme *Preparedness* (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024a; 2024b; 2024c), consisting of a longer article and two online tutorials; the first entitled *Preparedness and total defence from a library perspective*, and the second entitled *Free formation of opinion – the goal for society and a mission for libraries*. All materials were published in 2023, revised in 2024 and compiled on behalf of the national library of Sweden. The article reports on an interview study with local library managers and security strategists (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024a). The first tutorial consists of three parts: 1) A brief introduction to the formulations in the national library strategy related to total defence. 2) The recent development of total defence in Sweden, including the list of important societal functions. 3) How to learn more about total defence (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024b). The second tutorial consists of an introduction and four parts: 1) Free formation of opinion in legal frameworks and policies. 2) Free formation of opinion and manipulation of information. 3) Free formation of opinion as a value to protect. 4) Free formation of opinion in practical activities (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024c).

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the material. This process began with a systematic, individual reading of each text, during which key concepts and terms were identified. These elements were then analysed to discern significant patterns. To evaluate whether a concept or word was part of constructing such a pattern or theme, its relation to the research questions as well as its prevalence in a specific text or across the entire material was considered (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Thereafter, we collaboratively reviewed the themes, defined and named them. When writing the analysis, we repeatedly went back and forward, redefined and renamed the themes until satisfied (cf. Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 86-87). Below, we present the results of this iterative process.

## Analysis

Through analysing the material, we constructed two key themes that structure the presentation. The first theme focuses on how the societal challenge of crisis preparedness is framed in the analysed material. The second theme delves into how the library sector in Sweden is engaging with that challenge.

### (Re)framing the wicked problem

Crisis management is broad in scope and involves, for example, natural disasters, accidents, health related issues, technological risks, conflicts and war. Today, in Sweden as well as in other western countries, crisis preparedness is put forth as a non-linear problem of such complexity that it fits with the notion of a wicked problem. However, how this problem is understood and expressed has changed over time, and different sorts of crises have reoccurred throughout history (Kuipers and Welsh, 2017). In Swedish policies, crisis preparedness is closely related to security. After the Cold War, the conception of security changed and expanded to include '*the entire spectrum of threats and disturbances that modern societies face*' (Larsson, 2021, p. 306). This broad conception of security is evident in the *List of important societal functions* published by the Swedish civil contingencies agency.



In this list, an important societal function is defined as an activity, service or infrastructure which maintains or ensures societal functions necessary for society's basic needs, values or security (MSB, 2023, p. 8). The crises described are mainly related to catastrophic conditions where society must be prepared for maintaining emergency medical care, preventing the spread of infectious diseases and safeguarding human life and health. Libraries are only mentioned in relation to *Cultural heritage*, an important societal function described under the section *Democracy and preparedness* (MSB, 2023, p. 19). Here, it is stated that an important societal function for libraries is to collect, protect and preserve material, immaterial and digital cultural heritage and documentation of cultural heritage as well as maintaining activities. Preparedness is thereby related to the material the libraries hold and how it should be managed in case of emergency. Thus, even though other government policies ascribe libraries a role to, for example, make information accessible (see e.g. Sweden. Regeringskansliet, 2022), this is not acknowledged in the list.

However, turning to the material on preparedness published on the platform Digiteket, the more comprehensive understanding of crisis is replaced by a narrower focus on preparing for the potentiality of war. This corresponds with the most recent development in Sweden in which the government suggests that the Swedish civil contingencies agency changes its name to the Swedish agency of civil defence (Sweden. Ministry of Defence, 2024). Additionally, the leaflet *If crises or war comes*, which is distributed to all households in Sweden, was recently updated and the cover changed. In the version from 2017, three illustrations appear on the cover. They respectively portray a family preparing an emergency kit, persons managing flooding and a war-like situation (MSB, 2022 [2017]). In the version from 2024 there is only one illustration covering the front page. It is dominated by a soldier holding a gun (MSB, 2024). The more explicit war-infused policy rhetoric underlines the current state of exceptionalism in Swedish security policy and signals that the wicked problem of preparedness and security has been reframed. These ongoing changes are evident in the texts published by Digiteket, where the problem that libraries are implicitly tasked with addressing is more narrowly framed as preparing for the threat of war.

As mentioned earlier, Digiteket is a national platform for competence development among library staff. The aim of the article on Digiteket under the theme *Preparedness* is to give an updated view on how public libraries in Sweden work with preparedness (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024a). The article therefore analyses local library policy and interviews library managers. According to the article, preparedness is foremost connected to the library's role during the arrival of refugees in 2015 and the Covid-19 pandemic. The concepts of total defence and civil defence are only prevalent in quotations of *The Swedish national library strategy*. However, according to the material on Digiteket, more recent local library policy cites Russia's war on Ukraine as a rationale for emphasising the importance of preparedness within libraries (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024a). This points to a policy breakthrough regarding how the wicked problem of crisis preparedness is defined and acted upon. At the same time, the materials published on Digiteket illustrate the decentralised and multifaceted nature of how crisis preparedness and questions regarding libraries' role in total defence are understood and enacted within the Swedish library sector.

Both tutorials on Digiteket on preparedness highlight the crucial lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, underscoring the importance of societal crisis preparedness. They place particular emphasis on the pivotal role of libraries within the broader context of total defence and war preparedness. It is notable that the tutorials link to educational material produced by *the Swedish civil contingencies agency*, *the Swedish defence research agency* and *the Psychological defence agency* to learn more about preparedness and disinformation (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024b; 2024c). The practice of linking to these agencies can be understood as promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing between different stakeholders, in line with NPG (Kann-Rasmussen, 2024). Through these networking practices, libraries are inscribed in a context of securitisation and defence policy manifesting a perceived state of exceptionalism, rather than other potential

political contexts. Thus, both tutorials argue for libraries to be active in preparedness and in total defence in a context where military agencies are informing the agenda.

Even though both tutorials address libraries' role in preparing for war or war-like conditions, the tutorial on free formation of opinion has a slightly different approach, since its point of departure is libraries as agents for freedom of opinion. For example, the tutorial problematises the claims that democracy and democratic rights can be '*threatened from within*' (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024c). This is connected to the interview study with library managers presented on Digiteket, in which some interviewees expressed concerns about how the mission of disseminating societal information and 'correct information' may clash with promoting free formation of opinions. The library managers highlighted that this is particularly challenging in critical situations (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024a). Their statements further illuminate the tensions and different understandings within the library sector of how libraries should respond to the wicked problem of civil crisis preparedness.

### Assuming responsibility for crisis preparedness

As illustrated in the preceding analysis, civil preparedness in response to the threat of war is conceptualised as a wicked problem. Consequently, the rationale for public institutions within the context of NPG is to identify methods through which they can contribute to addressing this issue. The consultation response formulated by the national library of Sweden (KB) explicitly argues for the role libraries can play in such efforts: '*Libraries are a national infrastructure for access to information, culture, and cultural heritage in normal circumstances and they have a great potential to stand strong even in times of crises and increased preparedness*' (KB, 2023). In relation to the defined areas and functions in the list, KB argues for the following completions (KB, 2023): 1) The aspect of digital inclusion should be accounted for in relation to the area of *electronic communication and mail*, and libraries are an example of institutions disseminating digital tools and competencies. 2) Regarding the area of *democracy*, access to journalism should be mentioned and libraries included as institutions that uphold this function. 3) Relating to *fundamental preparedness*, society must plan for physical and staffed citizen service and libraries can be such places. 4) Also, libraries are contributing to psychological defence as providers of media and information literacy, and this function of libraries should be strengthened and supported. 5) In relation to the area *cultural heritage*, the collection of contemporary heritage must continue. 6) Lastly, infrastructures for research should be included as important societal functions in the area of *research*.

KB has not been appointed to make a consultation response to the *List of important societal functions* and is currently not a preparedness authority. This does not necessarily mean that libraries are not expected to be part of upholding essential societal functions in case of emergency. As Rose (1999, p. 234) argues, nowadays control is dispersed and immanent in the conduct of individuals and organisations. Furthermore, in the paradigm of NPG, cultural institutions such as libraries are expected to find solutions to societal problems and '*to do good*' (Kann-Rasmussen, 2024). In this way, the list does not need to explicitly ascribe responsibility to libraries. By defining essential areas '*necessary for the basic needs of society*' (MSB, 2023, p. 4) during times of crisis and war, an aspiration to be responsible for these societal functions is created which governs the conduct of actors (cf. Rose, 1999, p. 4). The decision of KB to write a consultation response and to argue for libraries' essential role in relation to several societal functions can therefore be seen as the library institution claiming responsibility for preparedness, and thereby as a manifestation of how governing during times of crisis is built on institutions' innovative ways of tackling crisis management and wicked problems (Kann-Rasmussen, 2024; Rådestad and Larsson, 2018).

In their consultation response, KB states that it wants to take the opportunity to highlight the role and function of public libraries in times of crisis or emergency. KB argues that public libraries

constitute a national infrastructure for access to information, culture and cultural heritage in peacetime conditions and has great potential ‘to stand strong in times of crisis and increased preparedness’ (KB, 2023, p. 2). The latter was shown during the pandemic and recognised by the government (Sweden. Regeringskansliet, 2022). KB’s response is thus rooted both in its formal assignment and in experiences from the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on that, KB suggests that aspects of library activities are added to the list of important societal functions for supporting the work of civic preparedness beyond protecting the cultural heritage. By these suggestions, KB’s consultation response argues for the library to be an actor in promoting increased preparedness, not least in times of crisis such as war and pandemic conditions. Hence, through KB, the library sector itself advocates for the vital part libraries can play in times of crisis or emergency, suggesting the form of ‘instrumentality from below’ that Kann-Rasmussen (2024, p. 592) associates with NPG.

To bolster the argument, KB’s response refers to governmental policies and official reports from the Swedish government that explicitly assign responsibility to libraries, particularly in the context of disseminating knowledge and trustworthy information (see e.g. Sweden. Regeringskansliet, 2022). This is also the case for the material on libraries and preparedness disseminated by Digiteket, which refers to the role libraries today are ascribed in relation to crises and war in policy documents. In this manner, the library sector is turning policy governance into self-governance by integrating these regulations into their own advocacy efforts, thereby asserting their responsibility for crisis preparedness.

Such expressions of responsabilisation are also evident on the Digiteket platform, where it is argued that libraries should actively assume responsibility for societal functions defined as essential by governmental agencies, and to take on responsibility for crisis management. Regarding the first aspect, this is communicated as something library staff participating in the course should learn about (Grenholm and Nersesyan 2024b). The role of libraries in societal preparedness is presented as a fact rather than a topic for debate. The course also aligns with the previously analysed list, with one explicit purpose being to gain knowledge of how ‘library activities can be linked to MSB’s list of important societal functions’ (Grenholm and Nersesyan, 2024b). Thus, the course not only addresses the responsibilities assigned to libraries by government policies but also explores the proactive roles that libraries themselves can assume in preparedness. Consequently, the selected material illustrates how key actors in the Swedish library sector argue that the library institution could, and presumably therefore should, take responsibility for preparing the Swedish population for crises and war. In the next section, we will discuss the potential implications of this position.

## Discussion and conclusion

This limited text analysis serves as a first step in a larger endeavour to explore how the democratic mission of public libraries is understood, imagined and potentially compromised in times of crisis and war rhetoric. In this paper we address this broader issue by elucidating different understandings and manifestations of libraries’ responsibilities in civil defence. The aim is to gain knowledge of the mechanisms, motives and potential implications of enrolling libraries in national security policy.

As the analysis demonstrates, the library sector in Sweden is not identified as a prominent or leading actor in crisis preparedness by the Swedish civil contingencies agency. The *List of important societal functions* mainly refers to a selected part of the democratic role of libraries as preservers of cultural heritage. This is hardly surprising given that the protection and preservation of cultural heritage until very recently has been the focus of research and policy on the role of culture and cultural institutions in crisis preparedness (Duh et al., 2022; McWilliams and Olsson, 2024). Rather, it is the national library of Sweden, acting on behalf of the Swedish library sector,



that argues for the significant role this sector can play in preparing the population for crises and war. KB's suggested completion of the *List of important societal functions* denotes a broader and more contemporarily situated understanding of the democratic role of libraries as promoters of free formation of opinions and dissemination of knowledge. KB's idea on how this role may be useful to society in times of crisis corresponds with how the democratic role of libraries is usually discussed in library and information science research, stressing libraries' significance for the local community (Hansson, 2019; Klinenberg, 2018), and their potential to form an inclusive meeting place (Carlsson et al., 2023) or a public sphere (Koizumi and Larsen, 2023; Appleton and Hall, 2023). Although concerns are prevalent in the analysed material regarding the alignment of the broader democratic mission with the objectives of national security policy, the overarching agenda is to highlight the library sector's potential contributions to addressing this emerging societal challenge.

KB's advocacy for an expanded role of libraries in civil defence, and its assumption of this responsibility despite not being explicitly designated such a role, aligns with the softer forms of governance currently prevalent in Sweden and many other western countries. Situating KB's reasoning within the administrative paradigm of NPG and the perspective of governmentality shows how the library sector is being drawn into the contemporary narratives of *exceptionalism* and *responsibilisation*. These narratives permeate the Swedish crisis management system (Rådestad and Larsson, 2018), reinforcing notions of decentralisation and the desire to delegate responsibilities, encouraging organisations and institutions to take on societal problems. KB thereby positions the library sector as a tool for the political decentralisation and reorganisation of emergency preparedness described in existing research (Rådestad and Larsson, 2018).

The advocacy for libraries' role in civil defence can also be understood as an expression of justification for libraries' legitimacy in a society where legitimacy stems from the institution's ability to contribute to solving wicked problems (Kann-Rasmussen, 2024). Previous library and information science research has pointed to the beneficial role public libraries can play in crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic (see e.g. Adle et al., 2023; Lenstra et al., 2022). However, as the analysis shows, the framing of crisis preparedness as a wicked problem is currently in a state of change, moving from a broader definition of crises to a primary focus on war and war-related threats. In the material analysed, no broader reflections are made on this change and whether libraries should engage differently when preparedness is referring to preparing for war. However, there are examples of contrasting voices, which, although less prominent in the material, express concerns about libraries' enrolment in national security policy in general. These voices become evident in the concerns expressed by library managers regarding the potential implications for how libraries should fulfil their mission to promote free formation of opinions if enrolled in civil defence. This suggests that there may be divergent interpretations of the specific responsibilities of libraries, as well as tensions between their current social role and their potential involvement in crisis and war preparedness.

These conflicting voices further point to one possible implication of libraries' engagement in crisis preparedness: that such involvement would hamper their promotion of the free formation of opinions. This in turn might affect the library's relation to its users. In the politics of preparedness, the library works as a bridge between governmental agencies and the population, since the library is given, and takes on, the role of disseminating credible information, digital competencies and resilience to citizens. The perceived need for libraries to disseminate information and strengthen individuals' digital competencies, which both Digiteket and KB account for, shows how crisis preparedness delegates responsibility to the individual (Rådestad and Larsson, 2018; Rose, 1999). Libraries are thus presented as institutions that can foster individuals capable of self-reliance and critical thinking, helping them to resist being misled by disinformation (Rådestad and Larsson, 2018). Such acts of responsibilisation may strengthen the legitimacy of libraries in relation to the

government and governing agencies. However, if libraries become megaphones for public information and promoters of information control, these acts may prove to work in the opposite direction with regard to the library users. Such tensions warrant further consideration and exploration, preferably involving an international outlook that goes beyond the Swedish case and allows for comparison between countries.

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