

Bridging the past to the future

– Why
national
libraries
matter for
the
survival of
small
languages



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- The Sami population is also recognised as an indigenous people



2021: New commission for National Library of Sweden

- 10 million SKR (991 000 €)
- Long term reinforcement of library functions for each of the national minority languages
- Four libraries get new assignments to strengthen the work with Swedish Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, and the Sami language.
 - Support to public libraries
 - Support to end users
- Suggest a future library function for Romani chib.
- E-book reading app “Bläddra” (Swipe/turn page), Romani chib and Sami languages



Bridge to heritage

- National libraries are keepers of the cultural heritage for the country.
- Usually no weeding of collections, over time building more and more complete collections.
- A key to historical explanations of suppression, discrimination and marginalisation.
- Historical records that are painful but absolutely necessary to keep for future generations to understand history.
- Bridging the past to the future by unbroken time lines in the collections.



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Closing the gap

- **Public libraries** usually have children and youth as special target groups.
- Public libraries give a first encounter with books, stories, and a connection to cultural identity.
- Teenagers needs strong support.
- **National libraries** are keepers of cultural heritage as well as a source of more advanced texts, science and research.
- Huge symbolic value of making texts on minority languages available.
- There is a need to access a scientific language.



Bridging generations

- How can I understand my grandmother? The same language is important, but not essential.
- “Reading” a book together, looking at the pictures is possible without sharing the same language.
- By using the library and its collections it is possible to bridge generations and build an understanding.
- A curiosity about one’s lineage, cultural inheritance, traditions, oral traditions, songs, dances etc. gives a cultural identity to build on.
- Build pride and a strong belonging to the cultural identity as a child, and an interest for the language will come.



Get the bridge to blend in

- National libraries and public libraries are equally important to keep small languages and endangered languages alive, thriving and becoming stronger.
- By giving small languages a natural place in the library and its collections, a better visibility, legitimacy, it becomes an integrated part of the society.
- Positive attention , make it easier for the speakers to make the language an asset instead of a burden.
- Swedish Arts Council have elected a Romani reading promotion ambassador, Bagir Kwiek.



Broken bridges

- Some of the smallest languages actually may already be lost - it is just small pockets of speakers, not enough to keep developing the language.
- Not enough teaching and texts to bring the language to an adult level.
- Some languages have a high influx of the majority language, historical texts become obsolete, just a source material for linguists and researchers.



<https://flic.kr/p/9W8Sub>

Losing speakers

- Rapid loss of speakers, fluent speakers bridging generations are passing away.
- “Lost generations” with double guilt.
- Natural places connecting the language and culture are fewer due to self isolation.
- Some languages are strongly territorial, when people move out of traditional areas they lose connection to other speakers.
- Covid-19 has a huge impact.



<https://pixabay.com/nl/illustrations/covid-19-virus-coronavirus-pandemie-4922094/>

Thank you for your attention!



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