Partnership or Battle: Professors and Librarians at the University of Helsinki in Times of Crisis

Kaisa Sinikara

Helsinki University Library, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland,
eevakaisa.sinikara@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1123-3216

Abstract

University libraries live and change through interaction with the scientific community or without essential interaction they fail to evolve and grow. This article studies the effects of collaboration between professors and librarians on the strategic development of libraries, especially during times of crisis. This study was conducted at the University of Helsinki (established in 1640). It is based mostly on historical sources, such as the annual reports of the university and faculties, and documents outlining plans and decisions.

The first crisis phase took place in the 1820s, when a fire destroyed academic collections and facilities and the university was relocated from Turku to Helsinki. A conflict arose between the contemporary needs of the scientific community and the need for a main library to replace the collections. Another upheaval was caused by the growing need for services for the post-war baby boomer generation. Nationwide library planning aimed for the creation of a separate national library and for merging faculty libraries with the main library. The third crisis phase involved the Finnish economic crisis of the 1990s and the digital revolution that continued into the 2000s. Solutions were sought through cooperation between the academic leadership, library management and personnel. The crisis led to the organisation of library services into two large entities.

The success of extensive changes in academic libraries is one of the key questions in management. The crisis periods under examination show that significant reforms are only possible through close partnerships between the library, the research community and academic decision-makers.

Keywords: Management; leadership; academic libraries; strategic changes; University of Helsinki.

1. Introduction

An academic library lives and changes through its interactions with the scientific community. In the following text, we consider the roles and interactions of university professors and librarians through three periods of crisis at Finland's oldest university. Is their interaction based on partnership or competition? The library institution at the University of Helsinki differs from those at other Finnish universities both with respect to its long history and its national missions. The university is comparable with other universities in the Nordic capitals, where, over time, national library services have been either combined with or separated from the university's library services (Cotta-Schönberg & Kolding Nielsen, 2008).

The University of Helsinki is an old university in Europe. Originally known as the Royal Academy of Turku, it was founded by Queen Christina of Sweden in 1640. The name was changed to Imperial Alexander University in Finland in 1809 after Sweden lost its eastern part to Russia, and Finland became a grand duchy of Russia. Each grand duke – the future ruler – served as chancellor of the university until almost the end of the 19th century. Finland gained independence in 1917 and in 1919, the university was renamed the University of Helsinki.

Library collections (about 40,000 volumes), scientific collections and libraries of the student nations of the Royal Academy of Turku were destroyed in the Great Fire of Turku in 1827.[1] The resulting destruction and the relocation of the university from Turku to Helsinki the following year sparked the first crisis phase. The second crisis phase was the post-war period in the 1960s and 1970s, when the need for education among the baby boomer generation required expansion and greater efficiency of the education network and library services. The third crisis phase, in the 1990s and the 2000s, was sparked by an economic downturn, changes in administrative and leadership models, and the rapid upheaval of the digital data environment.

2. Methodology

This article focusses on the relations between professors and the library in times of crisis. The theme emerged as part of a broader study, which for the

first time examined the establishment of the faculty and institute libraries at the University of Helsinki from 1828 onward and the development that led to merging approximately 170 separate libraries into the new Helsinki University Library in 2010 (Sinikara, 2022). The library historical study showed how important professors have been in establishing and managing faculty and institute libraries. It is therefore appropriate to discuss the topic in a separate article.

The key method of the study was the analysis of recorded archive data with source-critical methods. The study is based on the analysis of the university annual reports (1828–2010) and the minutes of the consistory and the faculties. The source material is more versatile than before from the 1960s onward; the planning of higher education and a more professional approach to faculty libraries necessitated the establishment of a committee focussing on library matters. This committee included professors and librarians. The minutes and planning documents of the library committee from 1971–2009 are also an illuminating series of sources.

The data produced with the documents has been supplemented with journal articles in the library field (e.g., Signum, the journal of the Finnish Research Library Association, was founded in 1969) and by interviewing key persons.[2] The interviews were unstructured, and their main objective was to obtain data that supplements the documents. The interviews are recorded in the researcher's archive.

The history of the National Library (1640–2010) published in 2012 is a significant secondary source (Knapas, 2012a). Sinikara's doctoral dissertation (Sinikara, 2007) has provided material for reflecting on the differences in values between the research community and librarians. Articles important for international comparison include the following: (Biggs, 1981; Cotta-Schönberg & Kolding Nielsen, 2008; Minter, 2013; Mowat, 2006; Roberts, 1977; Sahlin, 2011; Shkolnik, 1991).

3. Professors as Founders of Department and Seminar Libraries in the 19th Century

The relocation of the university to Helsinki following the Great Fire of Turku in 1827 led to both new construction and the re-creation of an environment

for research and teaching (Skovira, 2004). Efforts were made to replace destroyed collections of the Main University Library through donations and purchases. For example, the library received significant donations of Russian books. Great efforts were required to replace the lost national literature. The university librarian at that time was F.W. Pipping, Professor of History of Science and Learning (1783–1868).

Tensions emerged regarding the priorities of collection procurements, especially between science professors and Pipping, the librarian. Subsequently, a conflict over the arrangements of the collections led to Pipping's decision to resign after being head of the library for 30 years (Knapas, 2012a).

In particular, the demand by professors of natural sciences to acquire new scientific journals instead of donations of extensive collections was linked to international development. The increasing specialisation of the sciences was typical of the 19th century. The rise of the natural sciences in the second half of the century was affected by factors such as the growth of industry, technology, electrification, and new transport solutions, all of which required new knowledge of research and well-trained personnel. The discovery of bacteria as the cause of infectious diseases was a turning point in medical research. Emphasis was placed on the need to obtain the latest knowledge and to distribute it through international scientific journals (Ignatius, 2003; Meadows, 2006).

From the 1850s onward, professors of science and medicine began to subscribe to international scientific journals and reference books, and had them posted directly to their institutes (Suomen Keisarillinen Aleksanterin yliopisto, 1860, 1866). In the second half of the 19th century, institutes with work facilities, equipment and collections developed into the basic units of instruction, study and research in science and medicine. In the humanities and social sciences, similar institutional development did not begin until much later (Klinge, 1990).

Professors had a need for up-to-date information, which also led to the establishment of numerous learned societies and publication exchanges (Lilja, 2012). The scientific libraries of societies later benefited libraries of the University of Helsinki in several ways. Course textbooks were provided by student nations, whose collections were turned into the General Students' Library in 1858 and later into the Student Union Library, which later became a part of the university's library institution (Kuusi, 2011).

Changes in the teaching of humanities started to take place around the same time as the need for laboratory work becoming increasingly important in the natural sciences. Starting from the 1880s, young professors of linguistics in Helsinki were the first to introduce the German seminar model, around the same time as the first American universities (Shkolnik, 1991). Therefore, seminar libraries were required to support this approach, and to encourage students to pursue original research and study instead of only lecture and reading instruction.

The seminar libraries of the different subjects were compiled, forming the Department of History and Linguistics Library in 1904. Similar seminar libraries were founded for the Faculty of Theology in 1902 and the Faculty of Law in 1910. As previous research has demonstrated, all faculties that had been operating since the university's foundation (1640) already had libraries of their own during the Imperial Alexander University period (Sinikara, 2022).

The crisis caused by the Great Fire of Turku led to the creation of a separate service system distinct from the Main Library in Helsinki, which was administered by the faculties and departments. The faculties appointed professors to head their own libraries. Most libraries were managed on a part-time basis by teaching staff until the 1960s, when library management became its own profession. Discussion on the structures of library services began after the Second World War but results were not seen in practice until the 1990s, when the responsibility for managing libraries shifted from professor managers to librarians.

4. European Influences in Libraries of the Alexander University in the 19th Century

The libraries of Western European and North American universities were small-scale institutions in the 18th century, with limited possibilities for use. One reason for this might have been that the professors who were appointed to head the libraries were not obliged to work there, as their positions were merely representational. In the 19th century, there was a growing demand for high-quality library services and full-time librarians. The first professional guides for library management were written in Germany (for example, Martin

Schrettinger: *Versuch eines vollständigen Lehrbuches der Bibliothekwissenschaft*, 1808–1810). The guides considered it the library's key responsibility to produce alphabetised and systematic catalogues and to organise the library in a manner that would make it useful. It has been estimated that the libraries of European universities had updated their catalogues by the beginning of the 20th century (Minter, 2013, pp. 23–26).

The activities of the Main Library of the University of Helsinki were transformed in 1864–1871 by librarian Karl Collan (1828–1871), who published his study on bibliographical systems and methods of library work after an extensive study tour of Europe. This led to the upgrading of the library collections' cataloguing system. Several institute libraries reported on the cataloguing of their material in the 1890s. Efforts were made to organise them, even though the institutes had no actual librarians.

The development of science starting from the latter half of the 19th century also had a powerful effect on libraries in the United States. College libraries before 1850 were generally small and unimpressive. The collections of Harvard's libraries grew from 25,000 (1827) to 560,000 (1900). The influence of the German education system contributed to the rise of American higher education and the development of academic libraries (Harris, 1984; Shkolnik, 1991).

In terms of the number of volumes, German-language literature was dominant in the libraries of the University of Helsinki. At the time, the university was small and it was dependent on the scientific networks of the university professors, mainly with universities in Central and Southern Europe. Some French- and English-language publications were ordered by the medical institutes. Bilateral relationships of the university's Main Library in the early 1880s were mainly concluded with Nordic or German-language universities.

Setting up seminar or department libraries transformed the dominant position of the university's Main Library (from 1919 to 2005 the Helsinki University Library, and from 2006 the National Library of Finland) as an institution serving the entire university. Greater emphasis was placed on national library tasks and collections involving the humanities. Meanwhile, the 170 libraries of the faculties and institutes focused on the current literature of each individual field of study.

Similar developments were taking place in other parts of Europe. At German universities, the process was described as having marginalised the main libraries of universities because the number of institute libraries and their collections were growing faster than those of the main libraries. Serving as a counterbalance to the closed collections of the main library, the open collections of the institutes and seminars could be easily accessed by their own limited group of users (Siebert, 2014).

5. Gaps between the Increasingly Professional Library and the Holders of Traditional Professorships in the 1970s

Recovering from the Second World War changed Finnish society in many ways. The baby boomer generation needed opportunities to study. The number of universities established in different parts of the country in Finland increased from six to 15 from the 1940s to the 1970s, and their student numbers tripled (Eskola, 2003). Similar developments were underway in other parts of Europe. Consequently, the number of universities in the United Kingdom increased in the 1960s from 41 to 60 and the number of students increased from 100,000 to 250,000 (Mowat, 2006; Nicholson, 1998). In addition to planning for institutions of higher education, library planning was also needed.[3] In 1972–1985, the Finnish Government granted the status of central library to ten scientific libraries. Four of these were at the University of Helsinki (Knapas, 2012a, 2012b; Sinikara, 2022). Scientific input was now sought from the Anglo-Saxon world, which brought new literature and new influences to Finnish libraries via book donations and education in the library field. (Kortti, 2020; Mäkinen, 2001).

The University of Helsinki first examined the operations of its library institutions in 1969 (Helsingin Yliopisto, 1969). The number of separate faculty and institute libraries had increased to nearly 170. Although the combined number of volumes in the collections of these libraries was smaller (about 1.3 million volumes) than at the Main Library (1.8 million volumes), the libraries of the faculties accounted for a significant proportion of literature procurement costs (80/20%). Its status as a national library meant that the Main Library received a significant proportion of its new collections as free copies. In 1829, the library had been granted full legal deposit rights.

In the 1970s, the planning of institutions of higher education aimed at updating administrative and library structures. In the words of Vesa Kautto, a member of the committee preparing the organisational changes for libraries in 1971: 'The aim was to get away from the German-style organisation model for libraries that the University of Helsinki had implemented. We wanted to move towards the library structure of the new British universities.' (Kautto, 1992). The new universities in Finland implemented reforms in university administration while bringing the libraries together into a single organisation. However, the proposed changes sparked opposition among the traditionally minded professors at the University of Helsinki.

Two significant initiatives for change were applied to the libraries, the first of which was a proposal for an extensive rearrangement of the library institution. The entire library institution was to be turned into a single entity with decision-making powers to be put in the hands of the board of directors and a head librarian. The Main Library and the faculty libraries would operate under their authority, no longer under the faculty and the department administration (Helsingin yliopisto, 1970).

Another key proposal involved the establishment of a separate national library under the authority of the Ministry of Education, which would take on the national mission of the Main Library of the University of Helsinki. Thoughts about developing a national library were not created in a vacuum. After the Second World War, the need to update service structures became a topical issue in several countries. The National Library of Medicine of the United States was established in 1960. In the UK, studies on a national library to which several earlier organisations would be linked were published between 1969 and 1971. The British Library came into being in 1973 (Mowat, 2006). In Sweden, a decision to turn the Royal Library into a separate entity was made in 1971, bringing faculty and institute libraries together into a single organisation that was to become the Stockholm University Library when the university moved to the Frescati campus in 1977 (Lidman, 2002; Sahlin, 2011).

However, in Finland, the ambitious planning for a national library was unsuccessful. The oil crisis of the 1970s forced a postponement of projects that required additional resources. Underlying causes also appear to have been related to mismatched principles, values and operating cultures, to which both the Minister of Education and the Ministry's leading civil servants at the

time referred when they issued a statement saying that the planners of the library sector and academic decision-makers did not enjoy adequate communication between each other (Hakkarainen, 1982; Kivistö, 1978; Linna, 1977).

Extensive planning did not lead to a structural reform of the library establishment. Instead, boundaries separating the Main Library, the faculties and their libraries intensified. The development of the Main Library focused on creating national services, which contributed to strengthening cooperation among the university libraries around Finland. On the other hand, it was named the Central Humanities Library, providing services to research in humanities.

Meanwhile, the faculty and department libraries relied increasingly on their own faculties. The collections were considered to be the property of the department or the faculty. Academic staff decided on literature acquisitions, which the faculties and departments financed using the funds granted to them. The use of collections was usually restricted to the members of the faculty or department. It seemed that structural changes would not progress for decades.

6. The Scientific Community and a more Professional Approach to Library Management

The Main Library had employed librarians for many years and the library trained its own staff. However, management of the faculty and institute libraries had long been a part-time endeavour. Working at the library was part of the career path of several researchers who later received professorships. Although two faculties employed their first library professionals as early as in the 1930s, full-time library work did not begin in the faculty libraries until the 1960s. An academic degree, in addition to skills in the library field, became a new requirement to qualify for the post of a librarian. This requirement, for its part, brought about improvements in training for the field.[4]

Heated discussions were caused by the question of the professional identity of a librarian in an academic library, as well as the authority to organise library services and make decisions. Should research experience or vocational training in the library sector be prioritised in the selection of library

personnel? (Häkli, 1987; Kokkonen, 1988; Tammekann, 1987) There are debates on whether centralised or dispersed library models are the best options in various countries. It was a question of values and decision-making whether librarians or academic personnel should have the authority to make decisions about libraries (Shkolnik, 1991).

Tension can also be observed in the differences in key values between library and research staff, even though some values were also shared. Key values of librarians have included serving all customers on an equal basis and sensible development of operations. Meanwhile, the basic values of research personnel have included competition, which primarily applies to the results of scientific research and indirectly to the prerequisites of their own research (Biggs, 1981; Sinikara, 2007). Centralised solutions were especially supported by the directors of the main libraries because of the efficiency and lower cost of library operations, whereas teaching staff prioritised the efficiency of their academic work, which was better supported with their own department libraries and easy access to literature in them.

Upcoming changes were preceded by the introduction of computer technology into library processes. The planning of solutions at the national level began in Finland in the 1970s, about ten years after they were introduced in pioneering countries such as the United States. The use of data processing systems was not widespread until approximately twenty years later.

Although the planning of the library institution appeared to move in the direction of larger entities, efforts at the old university to enact change created a polarised relationship between the Main Library promoting the reform and the faculties; faculty libraries were established and run by professors and changes to the established model were unwanted. 'Only a few questions at the university included as strong opposite opinions as the development of the libraries,' wrote Professor Arto Mustajoki, head of the library committee 1993–1998 (Mustajoki, 2002).

7. Managing Rapid Change in the Information Environment Requires Partnership

Although the structural reform of libraries appeared to be impossible as late as the early 1990s, significant changes started quite soon. About 10 years

later (1998–2001), the collections and staff of about 100 institution and central libraries were merged with the three newly constructed science and medicine campus libraries. The changes continued.

In 2006, the national tasks of the Main Library of the University of Helsinki were expanded, and the library itself was renamed the National Library of Finland. Four years later, the new Helsinki University Library was established, comprising four campus libraries and centralised services (170 former library units). By 2012, the new, modern main building of Helsinki University Library was opened, with libraries of five faculties and an undergraduate library forming the Campus Library for Social Studies and the Humanities. This campus library provides services for 22,000 students and more than 1,000 researchers and teaching staff members (Sinikara, 2012).

Why were such great structural changes implemented in the 2000s? Previous efforts at centralising services had failed because of extensive opposition.

As previous research has demonstrated, the reasons for these included changes in both the operating and information environments (Sinikara, 2022). The recession of the early 1990s forced the University of Helsinki to evaluate its economic performance. An extensive administrative reform was implemented at the university, in which the highest decision-making authority was extended to personnel and students, replacing the previous professor-led administration. Financial and personnel management became especially significant in times of crisis; shared management training was organised for the library, administration and departments.

Performance management was leading to changes in university decision-making. The requirement for consensus was dropped in favour of majority decisions, which made it easier to make difficult decisions. Corresponding needs for change were also taking place in libraries. Karl Krarup from the Royal Library in Copenhagen called the traditional consensus-based management of libraries 'carnival management', and stated that real results required the acceptance of conflicts and tension when changes take place (Krarup,1992). Esko Häkli, university librarian at the University of Helsinki, wrote that university libraries needed radical changes and a new kind of management (Häkli, 1995). In the academic community, efforts to make radical changes included risks that could have led to unexpected results if conflicts broke out, involving the interests of faculties and libraries.[5]

The planning of the dispersed library institution was tied to the strategic management of the university. The launch of extensive planning of university facilities in the 1990s opened a time window for the libraries to combine collections and services at four campuses organised according to their branches of science.

Applying computer technology in library services advanced when the introduction of the shared VTLS library system in the early 1990s opened up a landscape with numerous library collections to customers. This system helped create a strong model of cooperation among libraries. This led to national procurement consortiums and a shared service unit for digital publications in the late 1990s. The national development was led by the Main Library of the University of Helsinki, whose expanding tasks and the name National Library of Finland were confirmed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2006.

The digital upheaval in scientific publishing and communication from the 1990s to the 2020s was influential, affecting the work of researchers, students and library personnel. Medicine and natural sciences were the first to introduce online publications. Managing the change of data environments according to individual faculties was becoming challenging (Mustajoki, 2002). Library managers actively sought international data and training. The university administration launched an international evaluation of library services in 2000 and 2004, drawing attention to the management's shortcomings. 'Who has the responsibility for developing the whole library institution at the University of Helsinki?' asked the members of the international evaluation panel (Geleijnse et al., 2000, 2004).

A coordinating director for library services of the faculties was appointed for the first time in 2002, with the tasks of developing centralised digital library services of the University of Helsinki and the personnel structures as members of the baby boomer generation started to retire, and to prepare for the merging of the libraries into a single university library.

Enacting structural changes required mutual trust among the management of the university and faculties, as well as among those involved with library activities. Efforts to establish trust included communication, constant discussions and shared planning, with the help of students and teaching staff, library administrators and personnel, as well as leaders of the university and

the faculties. The Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Science, which had been the first to create their own department libraries in the 19th century, advocated for the independence of their own libraries the longest. The final decision on merging the campus libraries into a single Helsinki University Library was part of amending the entire Universities Act in 2010, in which the economic responsibilities of the university and its units grew considerably.

8. Discussion

For an academic library to succeed in its task, it needs to interact with the scientific community. Times of crisis are a challenge to the functionality of collaboration. Three critical phases in the history of Finland's oldest university in the 1820s, in the 1970s and from the 1990s to the 2000s were examined in this article. They were all significant turning points in the history of the library institution. Each one involved a struggle for resources caused by economic scarcity.

The relationship between a library and the academic community is linked in an interesting manner to decision-making power and internal hierarchies in the university world. Traditionally, research has been the most important value, followed by teaching, with services and administration coming in third.

The destruction caused by fire and the relocation of the university from Turku to Helsinki in the 1820s created the first crisis phase, in which a conflict arose between the needs of the scientific communities and the main library's need to replace the general and national collections. The library management was sidelined. The professors' solution to the tension was to create separate libraries for their own institutes and augment the collections of the libraries of learned societies. Doing so allowed them to decide what kinds of scientific journals they should subscribe to and who should have access to them. Similar library developments were taking place in other parts of Europe as well.

The second phase of changes took place in the period after the Second World War. The expansion of the network of institutions of higher education was a response to the demand from the baby boomer generation. Active young librarians planning structural changes saw the need for change and put

forward far-sighted solutions. However, there was a lack of collaboration with the professors, who were the main decision-makers at the university, which weakened confidence in the function of the solutions that were put forward. As tools supporting the centralisation of services were also missing at the time, centralisation would have harmed the working conditions of the professors. At the University of Helsinki, the struggle for scarce resources polarised the relationship between the Main Library, which wanted to concentrate services, and the faculties of the university. The Main Library focused on cooperation at the national level. The faculties supported their own libraries, as the decision-making power in them was in their own hands.

Factors affecting the third crisis phase in the 1990s included the Finnish economic slump and the start of a digital upheaval. The university's administration switched from a consensus model to one with a focus on results, an emphasis on economics, and which accepts majority decisions. The development of libraries was linked to the strategic development of the university. An extensive construction project of University of Helsinki facilities that began at the same time also enabled the library premises to be merged. The data operating environments were at the centre of the complex change.

The development of data systems gave the students and staff at the university access to the collections of different libraries. Digital publications changed library work, the use of data materials and funding models. Library personnel born into the baby boomer generation were reaching retirement age. This was a turning point that was challenging for all parties, to which solutions could only be found through close cooperation among academic leadership, library management and personnel. The crisis led to renaming the Main University Library as the National Library of Finland, and to merging the faculty libraries into the new Helsinki University Library. Personnel and service structures were altered, and new services were jointly created to correspond to the needs of the scientific community.

9. Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, we asked if the relationship between university professors and librarians has been characterised by partnership or competition. The crisis periods that have been examined here show that the

university's internal hierarchy of values means that large structural changes in the library institution are impossible if the library finds itself on the opposing side to academic decision-makers. Close partnership between the library and the research community and academic decision-makers is the only way that significant reforms can be achieved.

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Notes

[1] The number of volumes destroyed in the fire was bigger than the collections of the Harvard College Library, for example, which totaled over 25,000 volumes by 1827. Harris (1984, 163).

[2] The interviewees included Professor Esko Häkli, University Librarian 1976–2001, interviewed in 2019 and 2021; Dean Hannu Niemi from the Faculty of Social Sciences, interviewed in 2019, and Professor Eero Puolanne from the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, interviewed in 2018 and 2019, both of whom participated in library administration and planning; Director of Viikki Campus Library Heli Myllys, interviewed in 2019; Library Director of the Faculty of Arts, later Director of Services Päivi Kaiponen, interviewed in 2014 and 2018; and Library Director of the Faculty of Theology Liisa Rajamäki, interviewed in 2014 and 2017.

[3] The Parry Report was published in 1967 in the UK. It commented especially on inadequate library funding; on average, libraries were allocated 3.8 per cent of university expenditure. By the 1960s and 1970s, the insistence upon formally acquired professional qualifications grew. Another significant development was the displacement of the scholar-librarian ideal by that of the manager-librarian. Roberts (1977, 467–471).

[4] Teaching library science and information science started at the University of Tampere in the 1970s. Later training in the library field became subjects of study at the University of Oulu and Åbo Akademi University.

[5] One example is the separation of the Undergraduate Library from what was then the Main Library of the University of Helsinki to form a separate independent institution in 1997, when the aim of the Main Library to rationalise services conflicted with the need for service by the faculties. At around the same time, the Science Library was moved from the University's Main Library to the Faculty of Science. The main source of tension involved the prioritisation of decreasing resources for national tasks versus the services of the faculties. Since 2010, the Undergraduate Library and library services for the natural sciences have been part of the new Helsinki University Library.