

# The Importance of Public Libraries for the Advancement of Citizen Science

## The Case of Sweden

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# Outline of the presentation



- Introduction: the assignment
- Background: national and international policies
- Definitions
- Available knowledge about public engagement in science
- Survey
  - Public engagement in science at the university libraries
  - Public engagement in science at the public libraries
  - Public engagement in science at the school libraries

*The National Library's report to the government on "public engagement in science" (January 2023)*

# Outline of the presentation (continued)



- Analysis and discussion
  - How does research benefit from public engagement in science?
  - How do libraries benefit from public engagement in science?
  - Why might the public library system be a suitable milieu in which to further develop public engagement in science?
- Conclusions

# Introduction: the assignment

- survey and analyse what public engagement in science
- focus on the public library system



*Sweden's National Librarian Karin Grönvall (right), receiving the assignment from Minister of Education Matilda Ernkrans (left) at the steps of the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm, October 21st 2021*

# Background: national and international policies

- public engagement in science or citizen science is part of a spectrum of similar phenomena described by the umbrella term “open science”
- the Swedish government hopes to create opportunities to increase public trust in scholarship and in scholarly research
- open science, including public engagement in science, has been presented as an asset for “challenge-driven research” (UN 17 sustainable development goals)
- open science has been a prioritised issue in the European Commission’s strategies, guidelines and recommendations
- both UNESCO and the Swedish government also promote citizen science and other forms of public engagement in science as a way to counteract inequalities



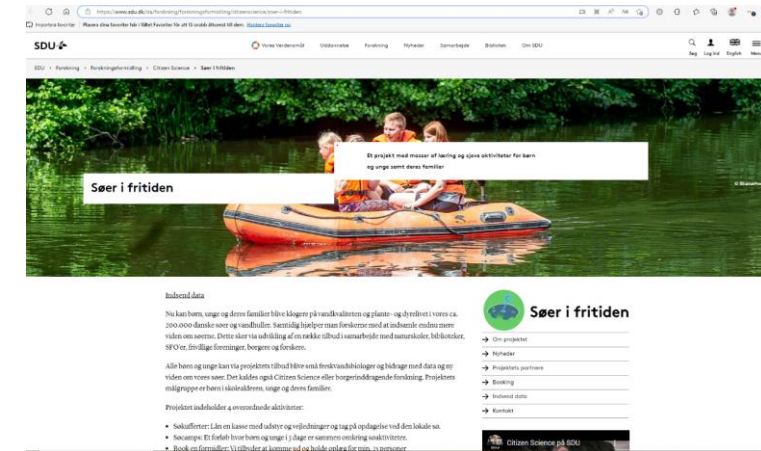
# Definitions

- engagement by the public = citizen science or other forms of co-creation that give actors influence over the research process in different ways
- citizen science = researchers and volunteer citizens jointly develop new knowledge
- citizen science can be both researcher-initiated and citizen-initiated



# Available knowledge about public engagement in science

- citizen science may contribute to involving individuals and most of the general public in research and scholarship, also strengthening the libraries' position as a societal institution
- there is to date no Swedish example of this type of initiative in the public library system
- to demonstrate Swedish libraries' potential we have to turn to examples from abroad, where:
  - university libraries provide the coordination and facilitate communication with researchers, whereas public and school libraries are tasked with sparking interest among borrowers, recruiting volunteer participants, organising reading groups, etcetera
  - public and school libraries can help to communicate results from the projects, and contribute future projects by disseminating information on their websites about resources for citizen science



*"Lakes in leisure time"*  
(University of Southern Denmark)

# Survey

- Public engagement in science in the university libraries
  - a general lack of understanding of what is meant by public engagement in science
  - lack of policy documents or guidelines that state that the public is to be engaged in science
  - lack of resources and lack of knowledge



*Stockholm University Library*

# Survey

- Public engagement in science in the public libraries
  - providing access to scholarly results is viewed as a significant task
  - library staff do not experience the same familiarity with the task of engaging the users in the actual research process
  - there are already contacts between the public libraries and the research community. Programme activities are one example of this.
  - informants perceive the research community as being closed - collaborations require that the public libraries themselves are very active and outreach-focused
  - need of clearer task definitions and access to good examples



*Göteborg public library, western Sweden*

# Survey

- Public engagement in science in the school libraries
  - school library users more frequently come into contact with scholarly articles
  - instances of true citizen science, in which the students are made truly participatory in science, could not be identified
  - there are examples of researchers cooperating with school libraries to study how the students themselves proceed when they look for information
  - the differences between different schools and school libraries are significant, which constitutes a democratic problem
  - there is not enough time or resources for any particularly ambitious projects that might promote students' scientific awareness



# Analysis and discussion

- How does research benefit from public engagement in science?
- How do the libraries benefit from public engagement in science?
- Why might the public library system be a suitable milieu in which to further develop public engagement in science?



*Mobile library from Sorsele public library, Lapland, northern Sweden*

# Conclusions



*Main reading hall,  
National Library of Sweden*

- A critical precondition is that researchers and the public are made aware of each other and find communication pathways that make it possible to jointly create new knowledge that is founded on scholarship. It is primarily for such contacts that the public library system can play a role.
- International examples show how different types of libraries can interact with each other for these purposes.
- Librarians must have a basic knowledge of the scientific community, of research and, specifically, of citizen science
- Open science and public engagement in science must be identified as areas of operation in library mandates and plans
- If the libraries in the public library system are expected to participate in this type of process, it is critical that they be allocated the necessary resources to do so.

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