



## A DIFFERENT STYLE OF CLASSIFICATION

**W**e've all visited a library or two while on holiday, but KARA BYSTROM stumbled onto something different when she visited a library on a trip to Sweden in 2017.

I went to Sweden in July 2017 to indulge in a little bit of library tourism. I visited a number of public and research libraries where many things were similar to Australian libraries. However, I was fascinated to discover that Swedish libraries have their own national cataloguing system. Although it seems that this won't be for much longer, as the decision has been made to move away from the 100 year old system.

Here in Australia we are used to good old Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), certainly not the only system around, but the most widely used in the world. However, when the 1917 General Assembly of the Swedish Library Association looked to implementing a cataloguing system for their recently established public library system, they ignored the examples of neighbouring Denmark and Norway and chose not to adopt DDC. Sweden already had a tradition of alphabetic notation and there were concerns that specifically Swedish topics would be buried too deeply in US-based hierarchies.

The Sveriges Allmänna Biblioteksförening (SAB) system they created, named after the Swedish public library association, is made up of 22 main areas, the flow of which has been conceptualised as an 'idealistic fall', moving from religion

and philosophy, through literature, art, and history, moving down through technology, economics and sport, and finally landing in natural science and medicine. As has been often discussed with DDC, the construction of SAB tended to reflect the standards of the day and the values of those creating it. At the top of the hierarchies can be found the official standpoints and dogmas of the times while alternatives are relegated to the bottom. An example of this is the State Church as opposed to non-Lutheran churches. The structure of the system can also illuminate the 'silent norms' of the times, demonstrated in the category of General Politics which don't need to be specified, while socialism, anarchism and communism are 'othered' by being placed in classes of their own. There is also a silent male norm, counter to which women are explicitly defined.

It seems that Sweden won't be using SAB for much longer though, as the decision has been made to move away from the 100 year old system. Since the 1980s there have been discussions about the pressures of maintaining the SAB system and benefits for international cooperation of adopting an international scheme. And in 2008, both the Swedish Library Association and the National Library of Sweden made recommendations to transition from the SAB system to DDC in both public and research libraries. Ten years on, the public libraries that I visited were still using SAB so the change is obviously still a work in progress, but my conversations with librarians point to it being inevitable. While it is understandable that not having to revise and update a separate classification system will result in cost-savings for Swedish libraries and international standardisation makes things simpler, I can't help but feel a little sad to hear that something uniquely Swedish is being lost. 🇸🇪

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## IFLA Global Vision

**J**an Richards reports back on the 2018 IFLA President's Meeting in Barcelona in the video below. To see more on the IFLA Global Vision that Jan is discussing please see the [IFLA website](#).

