Who Does the Mobile Library Reach?
A Minor Field Study of the Bookmobiles of Bangkok, Thailand.

Kristina Jagell

Magisteruppsats, 20 poäng, vt 2003
Institutionen för ABM, estetik och kulturstudier
Handledare: Kerstin Rydbeck

Uppsatser inom biblioteks- och informationsvetenskap, nr 178
ISSN 1650-4267
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background and Previous Research</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Mobile Libraries</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unusual Libraries</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s next?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Promotion and Development</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose responsibility</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical aspects</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim, Questions and Definitions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods, Material and Limitations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of Study</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand, General Information</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Library Development</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Day Libraries</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Libraries</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bookmobiles of Bangkok</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with Staff</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives of BMA Mobile Libraries</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buses</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Users</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievements</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments from the staff</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with Users</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do they come?</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library habits</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of the Library</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Service</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Comments</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths of a Mobile Library</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Objectives of the Bookmobiles</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions of Staff and Users</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Observations</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations:</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of References</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-printed Material</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed Material</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFLA Conference Papers</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles and Books</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1, List of Informants</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations

*BMA* – Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (the administration and organization of the City of Bangkok, and the responsible body for the public libraries of Bangkok)

*Bt* – Baht, the currency of Thailand. In January 2003, 100 Bt=21 SEK

*DDC* – Dewey Decimal Classification

*DNFE* – Department of Non-Formal Education (part of Ministry of Education and responsible for the public libraries in Thailand)

*GNP* – Gross National Product (the total value of the goods and services produced in a country, usually in a single year).

*IFLA-ALP* – International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions – Advancement of Librarianship Programme

*IMF* – International Monetary Fund

*LIS* – Library- and Information Science

*Sida* – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
Introduction

All over the world, libraries strive to make their collections accessible to the users. One way to make books more available is by using mobile library units and taking books closer to the users. In Sweden, bookmobiles have been a way to give service in regions too sparsely populated to have their own libraries. In developing countries, mobile libraries seem to go to the more densely populated areas since the number of libraries does not correspond to the need.

The overall aim of this master’s thesis is to examine how well alternative methods for library work manage to reach other people than those who visit the regular libraries and how these methods increase the numbers of users, visits and loans. To find out the essence of mobile library services, I deemed it more interesting to study them in a context where they are still being reinforced and developed. Previous studies have shown that a remarkable number of bookmobiles in Sweden have been shut down the past decade and librarians worry about the future of the service. Mobile units are being questioned because of their cost, while at the same time another country with less money in its pocket still extends this service. I found it interesting to find out why Thailand supports the public libraries’ mobile services, and what they believe they achieve by doing so.

When selecting a country, Thailand was a natural choice because of the special efforts made to promote reading and the expansion of public libraries there. The IFLA Regional Office for Asia and Oceania and several universities offering Library Science are located in Bangkok. Moreover, Bangkok provided a possibility to study the use of mobile libraries in a densely populated city.

The largest part of library work is quite international by nature and can be examined anywhere in the world. Another reason to perform the study elsewhere is that things we take for granted in our own environment become more obvious in a place new to us. Observations in another context would show some similarities and some differences that could turn out useful for a better understanding of both places. In a country where fewer people have the
means to travel to a regular library, or access to the Internet to receive information, the function of the library is more visible than it is in Sweden.

This work could not have been performed without the support of Sida¹ and has been done as a Minor Field Study (MFS), which is a scholarship program aiming to promote interest in and knowledge of developmental issues and international perspectives among Swedish students. The scholarship requires the report to be written in English.

Chapter one introduces the subject and previous research and describes material, methods and limitations of the study. The second chapter gives a background to Thailand in general and to present-day library activities there. The mobile buses are described in chapter three, relating the results of the data collected. The fourth chapter is a concluding discussion of the study and finally there is a summary, followed by sources and appendices.

Background and Previous Research
There is surprisingly little research done on mobile libraries. Below, I introduce the research I have found. There are a few articles and reports about mobile libraries in the world, but too few and disparate for actual use in the study. This has made it necessary for me to use more Swedish and Nordic material than I would have liked, but I can relate my results to this material. Regarding Swedish mobile libraries, I have found a number of Master’s theses and fairly solid articles and these are used to first give a background to the development of mobile services in Sweden. There is a passage on unusual libraries all over the world and a brief introduction of new uses of mobile services in Scandinavia. Finally I mention some research on the importance of reading before turning to the theoretical aspects used for the study.

History of Mobile Libraries
The very first mobile library can be said to be the horse-drawn carriage bringing books to the workers of the Mechanics Institute in 1859.² The idea did not spread quickly but after a while more mobile services appeared in Great Britain, the US and in Germany. In Washington, (USA) a horse carriage was used to provide services to the rural areas, starting in 1907 and ten years later,
a bus was used in urban areas as well.³ In Great Britain, the focus had been on urban areas from the very start and bookmobiles have been used in Manchester since 1931. Only in the 1950s did book buses in the UK begin to provide library service to rural areas.⁴ Germany has had mobile library services since 1926, starting with the urban areas. The Nordic countries all found their own ways of using vehicles for the spread of books.⁵

The first mobile library in Sweden was started in 1948. Helena Rojšek has written a thesis on “fifty years of Swedish mobile service”.⁶ She describes the development of the Swedish bookmobiles and examines the present service. One year later (2000), Lysebäck and Norrström wrote their thesis on the mobile library development in Sweden since 1948.⁷ They focus on three six-year periods and make comparisons with the library and overall development in Sweden during the same period. Together, these three authors present a thorough bibliography of previous articles, books, reports and studies on Swedish library development and mobile libraries. Most of them were written in the 1970s and early 80s and reflect the interest in mobile services at the time. Lysebäck and Norrström mention a study by Ulf Bolander of what makes some people indulge in reading related to the need of mobile services in rural areas, (Bokbussläntagare i glesbygd, 1984). The same year Ulf Larson suggested cheaper methods and smaller vehicles as a way to be able to afford mobile services at all (Mobila bibliotek, 1984). Lena Sanfridsson also suggests development in using bookmobiles as special libraries for children or immigrants (Bokbussen och dess utvecklingsmöjligheter, 1989).① Katrin Åberg made a study in 1987 of how the users in rural areas are accustomed to services being withdrawn and therefore it is important to give correct information about the library service and minimize their insecurity.② Since then, not much has been written on the subject.

⁵ Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 2.2.1-2.2.3. Finland was the first to start with horse-drawn carriages (1913) and the last to have a bus (1951). Denmark started with a car in 1926 to carry books between libraries, later on followed by a bus furnished with shelves. In Norway, a part-time librarian who was also a baker and could use the delivery-van introduced mobile services in 1938. To finance the buses, many of them were used in passenger service in the summers.
⁸ Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 1.4.
Before the time of bookmobiles, travelling libraries\textsuperscript{10} was the method used to promote an interest in reading. The library consisted of 25–50 books sent to lumberjacks, miners and railway-workers. Criteria for travelling libraries were that the collection the books were selected from must be of a certain size to offer some diversity, and that the travelling library should be adjusted to the interests of the people in the place the books were sent to. The flexibility of the travelling libraries was praised, as it was easy to adjust the titles according to interest in areas lacking regular libraries. One of the greatest disadvantages of the travelling libraries was that the librarians rarely knew the users of the library and had to send the most commonly popular books.\textsuperscript{11} At the start, around 1900, the county councils and enthusiastic associations ran the travelling libraries. In spite of a constantly increasing number of libraries there was always a stronger demand than could be met. The expansion continued until the 1950s when the method became out of date. Larger buses furnished with shelves and a larger collection were desired already in 1928.\textsuperscript{12}

A reform in 1930 making books more available to the Swedish users stated: “the library should provide books for all kinds of reading, have qualified staff and keep the books on open shelves where the user can pick out books on his own”.\textsuperscript{13} One of the goals was to let “every citizen, wherever he lives and whoever he is, borrow every book he needs with the least formalities possible”.\textsuperscript{14} This, in combination with inter-library loans led to a period of immense library development in the 1930s and 40s. Services became more efficient and this was the beginning of cooperation between libraries of different sizes.\textsuperscript{15}

It was not until 1948 that it was decided to try buses. They were already in use in Denmark and Norway but methods had to be adjusted to Swedish circumstances. Experimental work was started in Borås although voices were raised about the need for mobile libraries in several regions in the country. Vehicles would make better use of the collections, an argument that is still used. In the report \textit{I samma gamla hjulspår}, Helena Svenne says “the bookmobile gives fair service to sparsely populated areas and is the link to

\textsuperscript{10} In Swedish: vandringsbibliotek.
\textsuperscript{11} Adelsköld, Elise, Stahre, Ulla & Andersson, Lars G., 1991, \textit{Boklåda bokbuss bokbåt - fyra decennier länssbibliotek i Stockholms län}.
\textsuperscript{12} Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 2.4.
\textsuperscript{14} Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 2.3.
\textsuperscript{15} Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 2.3.
main-libraries and nearby towns”. 16 Already in the 1940s, critics claimed the bookmobiles were too expensive compared to the travelling libraries previously used. Others said that that was only the case if one saw the bus merely as means of transportation. 17 Considering other things, it was not expensive. The bus linked the staff of the central library to the staff in the rural areas, and qualified staff accompanied the books – not to mention how users could discover the possibilities of larger collections. A bookmobile could indicate the rate of interest in having a library before actually building it in a certain neighborhood. Another effect was that the bookmobile could welcome users who were not comfortable with visiting the larger libraries. 18 The first Swedish bookmobile visited five neighborhoods weekly and had an age limit of fifteen to keep children out of the small space. The bus was very popular from the start. 19

The library service has not consisted of one particular model all this time: some places have used the “reversed bookmobile service” where the bus brings the users to the library. Unfortunately, this method does not reach any newcomers. Different measures were adopted to subsidize the earliest bookmobiles, for example by sharing the vehicle with a delivery service for vegetables etc. An investigation in the 1970s claimed that a bookmobile in combination with branch libraries gives a better service than branch libraries could ever give as it stimulates a better use of all the parts of the library system. 20 The government bill of 1975:20 added, “for sparsely populated areas, the bookmobile is superior to any other kind of literary distribution”. 21 At this time, a debate on the efficiency of the bookmobiles was going on. Compared to branch libraries a bus was more expensive, all costs included. The bus had limited space and reference shelves, was not open at night and had only limited services. There was always a risk of delays. The cost of each loan was lower though, and the standard of library service higher. Staff was more qualified, the

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17 Nyman, Gunborg, 1958, ”Bokbuss i länet”, pp. 9–14.
18 Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 3.3.2. In a quote from Borås Tidning 1948-12-14 the librarian said ”Bokbussen har inte kommit till enhart för att förkorta vägen för de från stadsbiblioteket långt boende. I främsta rummet vill man nå dem, som aldrig eller sällan gör biblioteksbesök.”
19 Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 3.3.
21 Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 4.3.
bus had an outreach that brought newcomers to it and it was a meeting-place for the visitors, at the same time as it gave good PR for the region.22

Over time, things changed and from having been a non-permanent solution for areas without library service, the mobile libraries began to be used as an extra service. The number of buses has been closely related to the current government subsidies although the main goal for the libraries has remained: to reach everyone. Mobile libraries are still needed to attain this goal. Whereas northern regions still think the bus is indispensable, Stockholm decided to shut down the service. Most likely, this was a demonstrative way of cutting down expenses, as the bookmobile holds a large post in the budget. A large number of bookmobiles were taken out of service in the 1990s23 and it seems it is time to evaluate the methods again to find the most efficient mobile service.

Unusual Libraries
There are a number of varieties of mobile libraries to be found throughout the world. Bicycles, backpacks, boxes, boats, trains, streetcars, motorcycles, oxen, donkeys, elephants and camels are all different means to bring out books to remote areas. In mountainous areas, there are librarians walking with the books on their backs, in other places motorcycles or even helicopters have been a way to adapt the service to local circumstances.24 Last year, two of the IFLA Professional Reports were written about the Donkey-drawn Library Service in Zimbabwe and Camel Library Services in Kenya.25 Some of the other varieties have been mentioned in the press – by Greta Renborg, for example – and there are IFLA papers on the changing role of mobile libraries in Africa, on new technology in American bookmobiles and on the development in general in Turkey and Greece.26

One special kind of library is the Library Train for Young People in Bangkok, managed by the Railway Police Division. It is not a mobile library but has some of their advantages, being very small and with a friendly atmosphere. In an article by Cheunwattana and Meksawat, one can learn of the

23 Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 5.3.
special consideration that is needed when working with small means and very independent young people. Three carriages are used to offer library service and basic education to homeless children as a way to help them get “on the right track”. The project aims at “teaching basic functional literacy, as well as social norms, to enable street children to survive in a normal society.”

The library and its park are open to the public everyday and help to fill the gap between the homeless children and others.

A bookmobile can also be the way to unite people of the same descent. Jenny Grubbström compared an ordinary bookmobile and a Sami bookmobile, both in northern Norway. The library is essential in building and maintaining a culture, and in this case the bookmobile carries literature and items related to the Sami culture. The route changes with the seasons and because people meet there, the bus has become an important “marketplace” of information. The effect is not measurable but it is evident that the bookmobile encourages literature in the Sami language and that it is a much-appreciated service.

In 1986, Fairall and Lewin wrote their master’s thesis on the bookboat in Gothenburg (1956–1986) and described how it changed according to need from being an ordinary public library into a special library for books in other languages. Another thesis on the development of the libraries in Öckerö County focuses on the growth of branch libraries on the islands but includes a detailed history of the library services in the Gothenburg archipelago. In May 2001, Helena Niemi wrote her thesis on the bookboat in the archipelago of Stockholm. Her study on the development of the Swedish bookboat and its performance according to users, politicians and staff, reveals that although the bookboat has become rather out-of-date, other models of library service cannot

29 Grubbström, 1997, p. 19. Sami library work includes two tasks. The first is to build up collections and thereby support the existing literature (very little is printed as it is an oral culture) and secondly find suitable forms for spreading the literature. Read more about the development of the cooperation between government and Sametinget, financing and making a biblioteksplan in Jilkker, Gustaf, 1999, “Bokbussen utvärderad” or about the importance of it in Skille, Thor-Wiggo, 2001, “Reindeer Coffee”.
replace it within the next 5−10 years.\textsuperscript{33} The development of the capital city leads to changes in the infrastructure and with more roads and bridges, bookmobiles will be able to take over some of the areas today served by boat. Niemi finds that the boat is needed to supplement the main library, but that it is nevertheless the last bookboat in Sweden. One can read more about the history of the Stockholm bookboat in a book by one of the founders, Elise Adelsköld.\textsuperscript{34} There is also a booklet by the Stockholm County Museum, describing the library from a users perspective.\textsuperscript{35}

There are a number of boat libraries in various countries. Thailand has two floating libraries in Bangkok and there are such libraries in Alaska, Canada, Florida, Venezuela, Sweden, Finland and Norway.\textsuperscript{36} In Norway, the boat has had writers and music programs on board. Representatives kept a deposit and spread books among the islanders. Finland used voluntary library staff for the boat and managed to make the children in the archipelago read more than children on the mainland. Sweden has had bookboats in four places. Except for the Stockholm archipelago mentioned above, in Gothenburg, Oskarshamn and Lake Mälaren (Västerås). However, these services were withdrawn as they were not profitable and new infrastructure made them redundant.\textsuperscript{37}

Among the IFLA conference papers, there is one concerning “Mobile Libraries in Thailand”. It identifies the inconveniences in visiting a library as distance, the time it takes, expense for using or getting to the library, lack of knowledge of library and lack of reading habits. The mobile library has as its purpose to provide information and material, support reading promotion and survey the demands of people in an area for future library services. In the paper, there is a summary of the objectives of current mobile projects and hopes for future development.\textsuperscript{38} For the same conference (2000) Sujin Butdisuwan produced a compilation of all the on-going mobile projects in Thailand. Butdisuwan gives no comments but presents the projects and their objectives, goals and implementation.\textsuperscript{39} One project, run by the Department of Library Science in the Chiang Mai University, is described in detail in another conference paper. It draws the conclusion that enthusiasm among the staff is

\textsuperscript{33} Niemi, 2001, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{34} Adelsköld, Elise, Stahre, Ulla & Andersson, Lars G., 1991, pp. 23–37.
\textsuperscript{38} Priwatworawute, Poolsook, 2000, ”Mobile libraries in Thailand”.
\textsuperscript{39} Butdisuwan, Sujin, 2000, ”Reaching out through a mobile library”.
essential and that cooperation gives a much better use of the available material in spite of small means.\textsuperscript{40} Robin W. Doust encourages developing countries to use second hand material for bookmobile services, and suggests priority be given to service in densely populated areas rather than rural areas in order to be as cost efficient as possible. The Bulawayo Public Library, Zimbabwe, charges user fees which provide half of the total running costs of the mobile library as there are very many children members in the high-density housing areas.\textsuperscript{41}

Another IFLA paper is a report of Aree Cheunwattana’s PhD dissertation on delivering and promoting library services in rural Thailand. Although her five case studies are performed in a rural context, her recommendations are probably equally important in urban work as they point out the importance of good planning and management, professional staff, adequate funding, community participation, mobilization of local resources and cooperation between institutions. The case study of bookmobile services was the only one of the five to include adequate support from parent organizations and recognition of the importance of libraries by staff at all levels. It was also outstanding by having professionally trained librarians, not educators. The paper concludes that “both public library administrators and staff realize that services and resources are still inadequate” and statistics show low use and low demand for library services. This can be caused by “the lack of information awareness and lack of good reading habits” on the part of the population, or, from the community perspective, by “inadequate access to library services, unavailability of appropriate reading materials” and lack of time because of working hard. Community empowerment is considered to be crucial in the development of public library services.\textsuperscript{42}

What’s next?

A couple of investigations have been made to find suitable development for the mobile services in Sweden. A user study by Helena Svenne questions the present service and suggests major changes to justify the expenses of bookmobiles.\textsuperscript{43} Already, the number of bookmobiles as special libraries on a specific subject has increased. One way of using the library more efficiently is

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\textsuperscript{40} Saladyanant, Tasana, 2000, "Mobile library services by a library school: Chiang Mai University, Thailand".

\textsuperscript{41} Doust, Robin W., 1998, "Provision of school library services by means of mobile libraries – the Zimbabwe experience". The mobile service was started in 1978.

\textsuperscript{42} Cheunwattana, Aree, 1999, "Delivering and Promoting Library Services in Rural Thailand".

\textsuperscript{43} Svenne, 1995.
by going to institutions in the daytime and the general public at night. Another way is to let the users themselves ask for visits – that is, having a flexible tour. Cars or minibuses are used in Stockholm and Malmö, and a large truck in Hässleholm. It would seem that the mobile service is still threatened and the buses seem to be a remnant of an erstwhile welfare state. Rojšek describes how librarians worry about the day the bus breaks down, as they fear the service will stop that day.

Denmark, being the Scandinavian avant-garde, has partly replaced the buses by fast delivery vans for already ordered books. The great success of this has been said to depend on their awareness of quality, convenience and their focusing on a particular group of users. In the US, electronic bookmobiles, or cybermobiles, are under discussion. Keeping the buses up-to-date with the branch libraries is considered an economic way of giving adequate library service.

Reading Promotion and Development

A master’s thesis by Aliki Nilsson, *Barn, böcker och bibliotek*, concentrates on how the distance to library service affects the reading habits of 10–12-year-old children. To give students tools for information management, libraries must have high standard at offer and the schools the needed funding. Nilsson argues that outreach work is needed to avoid the circle of non-reading parents raising non-reading children. The actual person introducing books can have a larger influence than a large library would. Nilsson’s conclusion is that cuts in the budgets of libraries and schools put more responsibility on the individual child to find the information he/she needs. Reading promotion has also been studied by Andersson and Andersson in Malaysia, who looked at the library’s accessibility for different ethnic groups, and by Johansson and Morén who studied libraries in Namibia and their efforts to eradicate illiteracy.

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46 Rojšek, 1999, p. 52.
48 Khalil, Mounir, 1998, “The Electronic Bookmobile and the Internet”.
There is no doubt that education is a prerequisite for development. In developmental studies, it is said to be the road out of poverty and the necessary, if slow, step a country has to take to be able to compete on the global market.\textsuperscript{51} The attainment of basic literacy has repeatedly been identified as the most significant factor in reducing poverty and increasing participation by individuals in the economic, political and cultural life of their societies. Education is a major factor in decreasing infant mortality and a necessity when letting people take control over their way of living. Therefore, it is the base for democratic development and the prosperity of a nation.\textsuperscript{52} Education is a matter we expect governments to handle and the importance of it can be seen by the investments made in primary education by governmental and non-governmental organizations worldwide. It is also, along with healthcare, one of the most traditional targets for international aid.

From Sida’s reports on literacy in developing countries, one learns that it is vital to give continuous support to people who have learned to read. It may sound obvious, but it is a fact that many people have taken part in literacy programs and later forgotten these skills. To fail to give support for continuous reading can make the situation worse than before as the disappointment of failure makes people reluctant to give it another try. If worst comes to worst, as education had no relevance for them, they might even encourage their children to work instead of going to school. Not to follow up primary education would be a disastrous waste of human capital as well as of the economic capital invested from the beginning.\textsuperscript{53} Not only does a higher level of education have positive effects for the nation; studies have shown how individuals who become literate also learn of possibilities and methods to take charge of their life situations.\textsuperscript{54} Commonly used arguments for the positive effects of reading for the individual are that by reading fiction one learns about oneself and about human nature. Moreover, imagination, empathy and creativity are part of the actual reading process – while reading about other people’s fictive lives, one reflects upon one’s own dilemmas, alternative ways to act and how choices are made.\textsuperscript{55} The individual development that comes out of reading is also needed for a country to flourish in the tough competition of globalization. Once a

\textsuperscript{51} Norberg, Carin, 2000, “Trygghet och rättvisa är lika viktigt som mat”, pp. 8, 10.
\textsuperscript{53} Townsend-Coles, Edwin K., 1994, \textit{After Literacy, What?} pp. 20–22.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Education – a way out of poverty?} 2002, pp. 5–21.
\textsuperscript{55} Modigh, Birgitta, 2001, “From lending library to a public meeting place”, p. 5.
person has attained self-esteem, earns a living and can afford hopes and dreams, there is space for new initiatives and sustainable development can take place.  

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights promulgates the right to education as well as the right to express oneself and the freedom to search for, receive and impart information. As early as in 1949, UNESCO published its Public Library Manifesto to place the importance of libraries on the agenda. The manifesto is updated continuously as the role and the methods of library work have to keep up with society, and the aims should be applicable to all nations regardless of GNP or intellectual property.  

“The library is a prerequisite to let citizens make use of their right to information and freedom of speech. Free access to information is necessary in a democratic society, for open debate and creation of public opinion…”

Research on adult education has shown the importance of looking at education as a continuous process and how awareness of life-long learning makes people more inclined to take an active part in the social life.

Whose responsibility

The term public goods is used among experts in environmental economy and political science to describe goods everyone benefits from but that perhaps no one is willing to pay for in a market-economy. Examples are environmental control and education. It is difficult to make money on pure air or general knowledge, partly because its value cannot be estimated according to the amount (one cannot divide it into two and sell one part). Most people hold the government responsible for these expenses, as no one else will be interested in doing so. For the benefit of the many, we cannot trust the individual but need authorities. The political scientist Erik Eldhagen uses the term public goods to discuss development of countries. In the “GLOBKOM” report one can find the

57 Unescos folkbiblioteksmanifest 1994, p. 5.
58 Silenstam, Erik, 1993, ”10 argument för folkbibliotek”. ”Biblioteket är en grundförutsättning för att medborgarna ska kunna tillvara sin rätt att använda den grundlagsfåsta informations- och yttrandefriheten. Fri tillgång till information är nödvändig i ett demokratiskt samhälle, för öppen debatt och opinionsbildning om till exempel Europasamarbetet.”
60 In Swedish: ”kollektiva nytiheter”.
61 Pihl, Håkan, 1992, Miljöekonomi för en hållbar utveckling, pp. 7–30, 97–107. Pihl uses Hume, Kant, and Sartre to reason about what is rational and who is responsible. One of his conclusions is that the person with the greatest knowledge in the matter should be the one to make the decisions.
Swedish government’s policy for future strategies in these issues. Libraries can raise the intellectual level in a country, and if some people get more educated, it is to the benefit of everyone in the long run.

Summary

Previous research has included descriptions of the development of library services in Sweden, evaluations of the mobile services, the need for mobile services in rural areas and literacy. The importance of reading and adult education has also been studied and there are a number of reports on the relationship education–development. I have found some statements to the effect that to be of any use, it is important that the library is accessible to the visitor. It seems no one has studied how important it is that the library is apprehended as accessible, or what factors determine this. Hopefully this study will shed some light on what the users deem important for making them come, and how the library responds to that.

Theoretical aspects

To analyze the results of the study I use theories of nationalism. In a sense, globalization is making the world more like one cosmopolitan culture, one single nation. I should define the terms state, nation, nation-state and nationalism here as they are often confused. The state has boundaries, topography and can be seen on the map, whereas the nation is intangible and is a social group that shares a common ideology, common institutions and customs and a sense of homogeneity. "While an ethnic group may be other-defined, a nation must be self-defined" and is a self-aware ethnic group. The nation-state is the combination of a nation (people’s sense of unity) and a state (the geographical area where this takes place). It is “a bordered power-container” as a state alone has borders which need no administration. If the governing authorities deem it necessary to have control over its population, there will be frontier posts and documentation demanded – institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with


63 Connor, Walker, 1994, "A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a …", p. 45. In Smith, *Nationalism*, Joseph Stalin is quoted to have given this definition: “a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. It goes without saying that a nation, like every historical phenomenon, is subject to the law of change, has its history, its beginning and end.” p. 20.
demarcated boundaries. Most countries are in fact states or nation-states, although the misleading term nation is often used. Nationalism would be the political movement of ideas relating to the nation.64

Nationalism has been a powerful source in world politics since at least the French revolution, according to Anthony D. Smith. Revolutions spread the idea of general freedoms and rights, which in one sense are universal, and at the same time what makes a group (looking to its historical background) idealizing, patriotic and unified. Nationalism seems to be created by pre-existing and highly particularized cultural heritages and ethnic formations, shaping a new nation out of this. Smith continues:

I believe that the key to an understanding of nations and nationalism as a general phenomena of the modern world lies more with the persisting frameworks and legacies of historical cultures and ethnic ties than with the consequences of global interdependence. Their main effect on modes of human association has been to undermine traditional structures of community and to diffuse the ideology of nationalism, ‘disembedding’ it from its particular national context. But the disembedding of nationalism was already achieved in and through the French Revolution, and it is possible to see nationalism, paradoxically, as one of the main forces for global interdependence.65

Closer links are being forged between the economies and societies of our planet and it may seem strange that in the midst of this, ethnic and national identities remain highly charged issues.66 Tom Nairn explains this with all nationalism being the same, a universal myth using history and romanticism to engage people, and each people believe that their own nationalism is unique.67 Ernest Gellner says “[n]ationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist…” and this happens because privileged intelligentsia benefit from using nationalism to use the underprivileged.68 Smith points out that

Rather than viewing nations and nationalism as obsolete survivals of an earlier, more insular era, or as inevitable products of global modernization and late capitalism, or as perennial and natural features of human history and society, we must trace them back to their underlying ethnic and territorial contexts; we must set them in a wider historical intersection between cultural ties and political communities, as these were influenced by, and influenced, the processes of administrative centralization, economic transformation,

mass communications and the disintegration of traditions which we associate with modernity.\textsuperscript{69}

So how is it done, reappropriating one’s culture? According to Smith, the recovery of an ancient ethno-history is the starting-point of the process of vernacular mobilization. Language is of great importance, but also music, dance, film, sculpture and architecture, national appropriation of landscapes and construction of a national political symbolism and mythology. The “vernacularization” of political symbolism is particularly important for demonstrating the irreplaceability of ethnic cultural values in a global moral economy. These might be the figure of a king or monument or the mythology of a national revolution. Starting with the intellectuals, then a wider stratum of professionals and finally other classes, they are brought back to their real or presumed indigenous traditions and customs, languages and symbols, myths and memories.\textsuperscript{70} Next, there is the politicization of culture and the purification of the community. This involves removing all alien cultural traits and then reappropriating vernacular traits for a renewed indigenous culture.

A citizen is understood as one who, by virtue of sharing in the common public culture of the nation, exercises certain rights and performs certain duties towards his or her co-citizens. These rights and duties are laid down in formal constitutions or in common law, or both, but the underlying assumption is that the latter are codifications of the national will which expresses the shared pattern of values and traditions of the community. The external aspect of modern nations is revealed in the concepts of autonomy and sovereignty. The modern nation is a “political community” in its exercise of self-government and autonomy in relation to other nations. The “core doctrine” of nationalist ideology is that the world is divided into nations, each of which has its own character and destiny; that an individual's first loyalty is to his or her nation; that the nation is the source of all political power; that to be free and fulfilled, the individual must belong to a nation; that each nation must express its authentic nature by being autonomous; and that a world of peace and justice can only be built on autonomous nations. Modern nations implicitly subscribe to this nationalist ideology, and frequently invoke elements of it to underpin various claims and practices. On this reading, a nation can be defined as “a named human population, which shares myths and memories, a mass public

\textsuperscript{69} Smith, 1995, pp. 5–6.
\textsuperscript{70} Smith, 1995, pp. 65-67.
culture, a designated homeland, economic unity and equal rights and duties for all members”.

Any nation needs to define itself and unite its people. School teaches the children at an early age the right code of conduct, how to behave, how to speak and how to learn how to learn. Obviously, knowledge and facts are handed over by the teacher, but these are accompanied by a “hidden agenda” of morals and attitudes, which should not be overlooked. Would this make libraries simply an extension of the ruling government? A number of people have expressed to me how they expect a public library to have a collection cleansed of “inappropriate books”. In spite of this, the well-established custom is that a library does not let the government decide what it should, or should not, contain. Additionally, a library with a broad collection and professional ambitions will bestow higher international respect on the nation-state. If the bookmobiles should be of any use to the nation, they have to reach users and give adequate service. Ideally, they should reach presumptive users, but at least fulfill the function of a branch library service.

Summary
A nation is defined by its citizens and a common culture springs out from the shared historical events as well as from the ideas the leaders of the nation lift up. Libraries can be the tool of governments to impose certain values but more importantly is it an organized way of spreading general knowledge, something that is also in the interest of the nation. To see if this organization is of value, we have to examine if the library has an outreach worth speaking of and credibility among the users, which leads us to the actual aim of this thesis.

Aim, Questions and Definitions
The purpose of this study is to find out whether a mobile library can be justified by its outreach. The following questions have been posed for this purpose:

What are the objectives of the mobile bus library project?
To what extent does it achieve its objectives?
What are the opinions of users, staff and administrators?

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71 Smith, 1995, p. 56.
In addition to this, I wanted the users to express the impact the mobile library has had on their reading habits and how they think these would change if the mobile unit was taken away. My intention is to find out what previous experiences of libraries the users have had, whether they are content with the service offered by the mobile unit and whether they prefer it to having a regular library nearby. To do this, I need to know the objectives of the BMA mobile service,\(^72\) how it has turned out and whether staff and users agree on what a mobile library is. Therefore, I will start with a description of the existing library service.

Some of the terms that appear in this paper have many uses and I intend to give definitions of them here.

For mobile library I agree with the definition in The New EncyclopaediaBritannica:

> bookmobile (U.S.), British BOOK VAN, or TRAVELLING LIBRARY, shelf-lined motor van or other vehicle that carries books to rural and urban areas, establishes library service in areas that are too small to justify the creation of a stable branch, and acts as a demonstration model for communities that can afford library service and may choose to establish future stable branches.\(^73\)

I would also like to add that it is not a library unless it carries staff qualified to guide the library users among the existing contents. It can be used to promote interest and curiosity to encourage “first-timers” to use the library branch available. The vehicle should be constructed, equipped and administered to provide a service as similar as possible to the one given by a regular library branch.\(^74\)

Informal education – learning through various types of materials and media “without particular system or planning of method”. What people learn subconsciously, things picked up by listening and learning from parents or colleagues, experiences in life. May be organized but not with the person as the specific target.\(^75\)

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\(^72\) BMA (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration) is responsible for all public library service in Bangkok.

\(^73\) The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986, “bookmobile”.

\(^74\) Lysebäck & Norrström, 2000, 1.6. The authors quote different definitions, amongst which the one made by Nationalencyklopedin mentions “which makes stops at certain places” (som gör uppehåll vid bestämda hållplatser) and the one by Focus includes “a librarian follows and each bus can take 2,000–3,000 books” (en bibliotekarie medföljer och varje buss rymmer 2,000–3,000 böcker). I include vehicles that occasionally make a one-time visit and believe it is a mobile library if the staff can give the appropriate service.

\(^75\) Interview with Dr. Suvit, 2002-01-27.
Non-formal education – education organized by someone to give immediate and flexible tuition to persons who could not learn in the ordinary school.\textsuperscript{76} Can sometimes lead to a certificate or diploma.\textsuperscript{77}

Children – up to the age of fifteen, as defined by the BMA libraries

User – anyone using the library

Member – someone holding membership in the library, can check out material

Inter-library loan – when a librarian makes a loan from another library branch or bus on request of the user.

Methods, Material and Limitations

The methods used for this study are participant observation and interviews. A qualitative, rather than quantitative, method is appropriate for studies of opinions and attitudes. As I planned for a study in a place I did not know, interviews and observations appeared more suitable than the questionnaires I could have achieved. The interview is also good as it gives both the informant and the researcher a possibility to communicate with more than words and follow-up questions can be used to clear doubts. Going in depth with a few people can sometimes let us know a lot more about the situation than a large number of questionnaires would. The researcher then uses the different stories to compile a description of the subject. As the study is qualitative, I am keen to present the results in the same manner and not fall into a quantitative description.

A field study usually includes observing the surroundings and the people there. The difference between participant observation and mere watching is that an observation has scientific aims and is active – it includes talking to people, doing practical work and in every way possible getting to know the area of the study.\textsuperscript{78} Notes are to be written immediately and careful notice is taken to my own reactions to what I experienced, as they may affect subsequent interpretation of that moment. In the participant observation, used by anthropologists and ethnologists, one is aware that the presence of the stranger affects the situation and takes consideration to that. The method gives a lot of material regarding what people say and do, but one should be careful to

\textsuperscript{76} Department of Non-Formal Education, (year missing) p. 54. Using “flexible methods and response to the needs of learners of each level”.

\textsuperscript{77} Interview with Dr. Suvit, 2002-01-27.

\textsuperscript{78} Etnologiskt fältarbete, 1999, pp. 77, 87.
add the thoughts and feelings of the informants as that has not actually been observed.

As a stranger to the Thai culture, I spent as much time as I could with people to learn more of the behavior that would take place in the library. I spent four days at the Ministry of Education, Department of Non-Formal Education and seven days with the BMA. I kept a diary, took notes after each meeting to remember my first impressions and received some feedback from a Swede brought up in Thailand. It was difficult to act as a user in the library as I cannot read the Thai language. I could see the Dewey Decimal Classification, but not make out much of the titles on a specific subject. Neither could I read the instructions for the computerized catalogue or understand the exhibitions. I could not even sign in, or read the date as the alphabet and even the year differs from their Western counterparts.

I had hoped to make a broad survey among the users in Thailand, but as it would have been difficult to handle a survey in another language and I was not sure how reliable the gathered information would turn out, I found it more suitable to make a qualitative study. A small number of people would be able to give me more information than a survey – although I am fully aware of the problem of representativity. The interviewed persons speak for no one but themselves and one should not assume that they represent all the library users, or all of the Thai population. I have, however, tried to interview people of different age, sex and social background to avoid too much homogeneity.

What interviews do give, is room for the informant to comment, add or correct statements made. It is also possible to make observations of moods and body language, which may give an indication of how much value one can give the statements made. I was keen to let the interviewed person speak freely and only used the manual to make sure questions were not forgotten. Each interview is a little different from the others but circled around the same issues. Some of the questions had the purpose of providing me with facts about the libraries of Thailand; others were there to encourage the informants to share their ideas about the library work and hopes or fears for the future. All in all, 18 interviews were made with 21 persons. Two of the interviews were with young boys who wanted to be interviewed together with one or two friends. The boys were shy and those two interviews were short but their opinions were different than the others and I chose to include these when presenting the

79 For a complete list of informants, see appendix 1.
results. None of the boys held library memberships, but as they were regular users of the mobile library I did not discard them. All the interviews were made with a translator, but there were still many language problems. The interviews were recorded and have been transcribed.

Naturally, every study has its limitations and its obstacles. In this case, the material had to be collected during a more limited time frame than when one is close to home. My original plan was to go on the same bus route a number of times before the interviews took place, so as to build up some trust before we agreed on doing an interview in a neutral place. In reality, I had to do the interview when there was someone willing, and the interviews took place in the bus.

Having a translator affects the scene of the interview. In addition to translating the actual phrases, I believe it might be helpful for the communication between cultures. Having a translator gave me more time to take notes and gave additional information than when I met people fluent in English. Nevertheless, there are more obstacles in the communication process between the interviewer and the informant with a third person involved. In spite of this, it is the only method we can use to study situations in other cultures. Language, as well as Asian politeness, created problems no preparations could have foreseen. Twelve of the interviews were made with the invaluable help of Dr Aree Cheunwattana translating. Kate, a student of Library and Information Science (LIS), translated the other 6 and they were naturally on a different level of understanding.

The interviews of the staff and the users had to take place during 6 journeys; the supervisor was interviewed on a separate occasion. Before this, I had visited 2 “regular” public libraries and had the opportunity to interview the people in charge of them, as well as a politician and an association working with rights of minorities who lack citizenship. These meetings turned out to provide information important for the understanding of mobile library work.
Region of Study

This chapter gives a general background of Thailand in order to show the context in which the libraries operate. After an historical and political description of the nation, I provide the background of the educational system and the tradition of libraries. Finally, the different kinds of libraries in Thailand and a number of mobile varieties are introduced. Unless stated differently, all facts in the passage “Thailand, General Information” are taken from Länder i fickformat, Thailand.80

Thailand, General Information

Thailand has an area of 513,115 km2, which is comparable to that of Spain. It is 1,700 km long and stretches over mountains, hills, tropical forests, river deltas and coastland. Bangkok is the heart of it all, as half of Thailand’s industrial production comes from here and it is a rapidly growing center of activity. Out of the 60 million inhabitants, 9.34 officially live in the Bangkok Metropolitan Municipality, but no one can estimate how many fortune seekers have moved in with their relatives in search of a job.81 The city has the worst traffic jams of Asia and serious environmental difficulties.

Quite remarkable is the fact that unlike other countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand has not been colonized. It has been an independent nation since the 13th century, apart from short periods of Burmese subjection and Japanese occupation during the Second World War. Europeans have had interests in the area ever since the 16th century. As Thailand (Siam) was surrounded by British, Dutch and French colonies, its kings tried to adjust to their demands to keep the country and its culture intact. In reaction to these adjustments and to foreigners the nation went into a century of isolation. The power of the king

80 Thailand, Länder i fickformat nr 802, 1998.
81 BMA says 9.34 million. Cummings, Joe, 2001, Bangkok, Lonely Planet, p. 17., says the population density averages an astonishing 3,600 persons per square kilometer.
weakened and Burma took the opportunity to destroy the Siamese capital, Ayutthaya, in 1767.

Bangkok was founded in 1782. The first kings of the Chakri-dynasty strengthened the country and once again international interests were welcome. Through diplomacy and discarding land, Thailand stayed independent, becoming a buffer zone between British and French colonies. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) interest in technology and western ideas increased. He modernized the country, founded government schools, and has been called "the father of modern Thailand". Growing production and export of rice made Bangkok flourish in the early 1900s.

The king’s position was in opposition to the new bureaucratic elite, and twenty years after the 1912 coup, he had to accept a constitutional monarchy. The new elite had a western education and Marshal Phibun Songkhram was an admirer of Hitler. In 1939, Siam became Thailand. The Japanese occupied the country, but were relatively mild, as Thailand had a fascistic model of society already. The time after the Second World War was unstable and there were military coups and economic upswings during the 1950s. The US supported the country during the Korean War to make it a bastion against communism. Phibun was replaced, captured the leadership for another ten years, but lost power in 1957 to Sarit Thanarat. The new dictatorship encouraged traditional values. The Vietnam War had brought American bases and a good economy, but in the 1970s, the Americans withdrew and an unstable economy caused student riots in 1973. The military regime ended then only to be followed by three years of changing parties comprised of students, farmers and monks, and the military parties gained strong support again. A new military dictatorship dealt harshly with the “lefties”.

In the 1980s, tolerance for dissidents increased, as did contacts with the US. Oil, economic growth, and modernization changed the social structure of Thai society remarkably. There was stability but no ideology. The old political structure where those in power kept their position by creating “patron–client” relationships with the voters, was replaced by alliances formed by values and political ideas. This democratization led to an attempted coup in 1985. The interests of trade and industry led to expansion, but also to disapproval of the negative effects of capitalism (such as inflation, corruption, traffic density, environmental problems, drugs and AIDS). The resulting instability produced a demand for democracy, something that was achieved by the bloody demonstrations in 1992 that no one speaks of.
Since then, there have been arrangements by corrupt leaders, demonstrations, agreements and unions working for sustainable development. After the economic crises in 1997, the IMF\textsuperscript{82} and a new constitution straightened out the country. The constitution has been called “the people’s constitution” and brought many changes in the country’s democratic system and political structure.\textsuperscript{83} It is now compulsory to vote, there is freedom of speech, freedom of the press and several other fundamental rights and freedoms. A National Human Rights Commission was created.\textsuperscript{84}

Since 1932 when Thailand changed from 700 years of absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy, the country has experienced 17 military coups. Most of them have been bloodless. Still, the stabilizing role of the royal family should not be overlooked; the present king, Bhumipol, has more than once been the determining factor for the peaceful outcome of conflicts. To quote Mats Borner, it is “a fragile democracy with strong military influences”.\textsuperscript{85}

I believe a strong national culture has developed over the centuries. To an outsider, it may seem like everything Thai is considered superior. People are content, perhaps as a result of Buddhism saying that you have the life you have earned from previous lives.\textsuperscript{86} One of the effects of Thailand never having been colonized is that although English is compulsory in the schools, it is mainly spoken by highly educated people or people involved in tourism. King Bhumibol Adulyadej and his family, considered to be half-deities, are shown great respect and his portrait has a given place in every home. The events of the royal family are broadcasted on television on prime time, daily.

Education and Library Development
Since 1921, school has been compulsory and almost all children aged six attend school. The literacy rate is among the higher in Asia and has received a

\textsuperscript{82} International Monetary Fund, lending out money on the condition the country allows a Structural Adjustment Program.

\textsuperscript{83} Asean Youth Online, http://www.aseanyouth.com/thailand/whoincharge.asp [available 2003-03-18].

\textsuperscript{84} Landstrategi Thailand 1 januari–31 december 2004, 2000, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{85} Borner, Mats, http://w1.428.telia.com/~u42803547/kap24.htm [available 2002-11-28]. A private site that is updated often and found trustworthy when compared to other sources. ”en bräcklig demokrati med starkt militärt inflytande.”

\textsuperscript{86} Buddhism is essential to understand the Thai culture. The majority acknowledges the Theravada-Buddhism that focuses less on the Nirvana (extinction) and more on good deeds to improve one’s situation in this life or the next. All men are to spend some time as a monk before marriage and all government employees are granted a three-month-leave for this purpose, according to Länder i fickformat.
lot of attention from the government since the 1950s.\textsuperscript{87} In 1996 the years of compulsory basic education were increased from six to nine, and from 2004 it will be extended to twelve years. About 20 percent continue on to university studies.

King Ramkhamhaeng invented the Thai script in 1283.\textsuperscript{88} Silacharuk, an inscription in stone, is considered to be the first book and copies are on display in many libraries. With the spread of Buddhism from Sri Lanka, using palm leaves for scriptures was introduced. The oldest preserved document written on palm leaves dates back to 1471.\textsuperscript{89}

The libraries of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century were built on stilts in temple ponds to keep the books out of reach for termites and rats. The first library to be open for visits was the Vajirayana Library (1884), administered by a committee of eleven members and open to anyone holding a membership. It later merged with two other libraries to form the National Library with a collection of 200,000 items in 1906.\textsuperscript{90}

Looking at history it may seem like instability is the reason libraries have not flourished; but more important is probably the lack of interest in reading. As part of the endeavors to advance the Thai language and alphabet, reading has been promoted and the royal family is very supportive of the arts. Thailand is one of the developing countries with the highest rate of published books and newspapers.\textsuperscript{91} This may be a sign of the great support the printed culture receives in the government’s expectations to make reading firmly established in the country.

\textbf{Present Day Libraries}

Modern libraries in accordance with the Western concept started in 1916 with the founding of the Chulalongkorn University. Public library services are mainly provided in the 76 provinces of the country by the Department of Non-Formal Education (Ministry of Education). The DNFE has provincial libraries,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{87} Strong campaigns in the 1950s was the foundation of today’s 95 % literacy although it is difficult to know what is meant with literacy…some of the students pass the test if they can write their own name and the name of the village. If 94.5 % are literate, still 3 million people are considered illiterate!
\item \textsuperscript{91} In 1995, Thai publishers published 10,000 titles. Cheunwattana, 1999, p. 2.
\end{itemize}
district libraries and information and learning centers in villages. Emphasis is put on the library being a place for informal education. Some innovative projects have had their chance, but in the end it is a matter of the interests of the current minister of education.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Municipality is administered by the BMA, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. It is divided into 50 districts, covering an area of 1,568,373 square meters. The first public library was the Suan Lumphini Library dating from 1956. Since then, the number of libraries has expanded to 20 libraries, 10 mobile buses and 11 “Home Libraries” – the latter being containers furnished to be small library units in the communities. It is, of course, far from sufficient for a population of 10–15 million people.

As a celebration of the birthday of Her Royal Highness Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn, the patron of libraries, 36 “Chalermrajgumari” libraries were built according to a new standard. All of them have reading rooms, local exhibitions, a Buddhist room, computer equipment, children’s corner and a garden for the ones who do not dare to enter. At the moment of writing, the number of Chalermrajgumari libraries exceeds 80.

The Center for the Promotion of the Informal Education within the Ministry of Education provides a mobile (floating) public library service along the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok. The library boat can bring approximately 2,000 books and gives weekly service to eight communities along the river. It hosts educational sessions on important issues such as water, health and environment, and brings urban children on excursions outside of Bangkok.

The National Library is a section of the Department of Fine Arts and has 16 branches in the country. Students use it and it seemed as if checking out books was not allowed, but extensive Xerox services were offered.

There are about 450 special libraries and university libraries. In addition to the public libraries provided by the government, there are some private initiatives to give library service in communities.92

There are two major obstacles to library development; namely, the fragmented organization resulting in sparse cooperation between different kinds of libraries and library issues not being a top priority for the offices managing them. The National Library, school libraries and special libraries are all organized in different ways, depending on who is responsible for the library. All the public libraries in Thailand are organized by the DNFE.

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Ministry of Education, except for the public libraries of Bangkok, which are run by the Social Welfare Department (Recreation Division, Public Library Section) of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). These two do not cooperate but have the same aim: to provide public library services for all the citizens of the nation. The BMA sends a plan for library development to the DNFE and make sure that it corresponds to the National Development Plan. Other than that, they are free to work as they please. Another problem, for both these organizations, may be that the library work is one task among many others and may receive different attention depending on the current director, or the amount of pressure the librarians manage to put for their issues.

Donations are more common in Thailand than in Sweden, rarely cash but books or sometimes vehicles or furniture. People are more willing to give to a temple than to institutions, but the librarians encourage the monks to contribute to new libraries.

Librarians have a 4–5 year education in Library Science or Non-Formal Education and as government employees, they retire at 60.

**Mobile Libraries**

Approximately 40 million Thai live in rural areas, which are quite different from each other. To provide books and information, Thailand has tried several different forms of mobile and outreach library service, partly in remote rural areas, partly in disadvantaged urban areas.

The BMA (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration) have 10 mobile buses for the disadvantaged and for communities requesting library services. In addition to reading services, the mobile library also provides reading promotional activities, e.g. storytelling, game and quiz programs and stage performances.

In 2001, the BMA launched “home libraries” where two containers are joined to make a simple and inexpensive branch library measuring 3x6 meters. There are currently 11 home libraries but plans are afoot to arrange for another 20 during 2003. They are well used by school children who go there after

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93 The special libraries and university libraries are working on better cooperation but progress is slow. Even though some of the libraries have their catalogues on OPAC, these are not connected to each other.

94 It is more common to give donations to a temple than to those in need. It is also common to give donations to the royal family, as they are considered half-deities.

school has finished. Opening hours are 10.00−19.00 as it is not safe to have them open longer at night.

There are two floating libraries, serving the communities of the Chao Phraya River. The smaller boat has books, tapes, videos and games. It serves eight communities once a week. The larger boat has computers and educational activities. It gives children and adults a chance to learn about environmental issues, health and what life is like for people outside of the city.

The police run a project in the main railway station for homeless children, to reduce the crime rate and channel the children into more constructive activities. The Library Train consists of two rebuilt carriages and has a small garden and a playground – something that encourages the public to come and mix with the homeless. Certain police officers act as tutors for the groups of homeless children. Another train library was set up in the slum community of Bangsue, where three carriages act as classroom, library and music/computer room.96

In the northeast of Thailand, a university has set up a program with a rotating bookmobile service in rural schools. Each program covers a period of two years and provides services to 10 schools during that time. The bookmobile van, with three professionally trained project workers, visits twice a month. They hold reading sessions with the students and leave boxes with books until the next visit. Another university initiated an outreach information project in 1981 and has since then led a summer library program for children. The project members conduct activities on many topics that can lead to reading. Book boxes are sent to villages and circulated among them every 20 days. For both these rural programs, the concept of reading as continuing education is emphasized. Sufficient hours, continuity of service, attention to local needs, simplicity and economical but creative and down-to-earth approaches have been crucial.

Portable libraries exist in different sizes. In Bangkok, the Srinakharinwirot University has used wooden boxes the size of a suitcase since 1979, whereas in Chiang Mai, the Province Library uses three boxes measuring 1x1x0.5 meters. These are easy to transport and are opened as shelves to display the books, videos and CDs. Every village can keep the cases for a week. The project has not even been running for a year and the interval between visits has not been decided. So far, the aim seems to be more to create an interest in reading.

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96 The first started in Hualumphong in 1999, a second in Bangsue in 2001.
A District Library nearby uses paper boxes to send reading material to the villages. The boxes are rotated between them each month and the number of participating villages increases every year. Other libraries use shoulder bags to bring small amounts of books out to remote areas.

Another project services schools in remote and disadvantaged areas. Each service takes 2–3 days and includes a training workshop for teachers and librarians as well as an exhibition of books and information materials. Racks with sewn pockets, 1x3 meters in size, can hold 100–150 books. These can be fastened between trees, around a tree, along a wall or a fence, but are still foldable to a hand-carryable size.

The DNFE runs an elephant delivery project to bring instruction materials and teachers to more than 300 villages. It is not a mobile library service in a strict sense, but interesting in the way it has been designed. Elephants are needed as no other means of transportation can bring the materials through the dense forest. Bringing a satellite dish, electricity generators and other equipment to hill tribe people gives them a chance to learn about the surrounding world. The villagers receive literacy training for 2–3 days every three weeks. The importance of this cannot be underestimated: a basic understanding of spoken and written Thai is a prerequisite to acquire citizenship.97

Some bus stations have books to borrow while waiting in the station. Some of the long-distance buses have reading material for the journey.

Summary
To sum up, I believe that Thailand is a nation that is working with developing its library work and trying innovative methods to reach its citizens. This might be part of the attempt to create stability in the nation and continue to develop as one of the more modern nations in South-East Asia. Perhaps it is also a way to regain the position Thailand had before the economic crises of 1997. This leads us to the part examining the actual mobile library work and the results of this particular study.

97 Elephant Delivery NFE Project Description, 2002, p. 3. Even in 2002, a number of 300,000 people between the ages of 15 and 50 years old are illiterate in Thailand.
The Bookmobiles of Bangkok

This chapter describes the bookmobiles of Bangkok, using information from interviews with the supervisor and four bookmobile librarians, and interviews with users. The librarians described the library in more or less one voice so their response is shown in a text that ends with the more varied opinions and comments. Users were diverse and to give an account of the different kinds of replies, I found it more suitable to report both question and answer in this section.

Interviews with Staff
The following text is compiled from interviews and observations of four bookmobile librarians and their supervisor.

Objectives of BMA Mobile Libraries
The reason for the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) to have mobile libraries is “to provide public library service for the citizens of Bangkok”\(^98\). Unfortunately, the objectives do not seem to be more clearly defined than that. According to the librarians’ supervisor, BMA finds that 20 libraries and 10 ‘home’ libraries are not sufficient to serve the 9.34 million people living in Bangkok. This makes it necessary to supplement these libraries with the 10 bookmobiles. The goal is to reach everyone, which is of course far from reality today. Still, even though the bookmobiles are not enough, it is one step towards reaching the goal. Although there are budget constraints, the library staff do what they can to increase their services – and their budget – every year\(^99\).

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\(^98\) The supervisor wrote me: “The objective of the library service of the BMA is to provide public library service for the citizens of Bangkok through 20 public libraries, 10 mobile libraries and 10 home libraries (containers).”

\(^99\) Interview 5. This year they increased the budget with 10 %. For 2003 the total budget for Library service has been increased from 27,753,600 to 47,187,000 Bt. 6,360,400 Bt are for books.
One librarian had a document stating that special priority was to be given to children, young adults and people in the slum communities to promote reading habits and improve the quality of life. At the same time, they said a new service point is selected according to the need and interest of the local library services. It would surprise me if the BMA would not prefer to have the bookmobile standing in a place where people make use of it, rather than having it in an area where the majority strives to survive the day.

The economic crises of 1997 made it necessary to try to find innovative methods of providing library services. It is not possible to employ permanent staff or build as many branch libraries as needed, but “home libraries”, made of containers, turned out to be a successful investment. And, there is no doubt the bookmobiles are efficient as they concentrate visits to the time they are at the service point. The tendency is to expand, rather than reduce, the mobile services, which were started in 1992.

A mobile library can reach people who would not find their way to a regular library. The supervisor of the librarians explains how people in the outskirts are less familiar with using a library. It is not likely that the bookmobile is the gateway to becoming a regular user, as they only go to communities that do not have a library building. Still, the supervisor agreed when I asked if the mobile is more suitable for people of low income, who are not so used to big city life and may think that the library is only for academics. A different approach, like that of a bookmobile, may be more suitable for adults as well as children in these areas. “These people will be more easily adjusted to these sorts of services more than to come into the building.” The Chalermrajgumari libraries failed in that sense to reach the people, as they are so grand people feel afraid to go there. The librarians agree that reading promotion activities are important or even very important, and it is evident that their everyday situation is quite different from the regular libraries where users already have the habit of reading. One librarian says: ”If you tell housewives to go to the public library they are intimidated. In the bus they feel more comfortable and they will know the librarian.”

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100 Interview 4.
101 Another way to cope has been to ask the temples to support libraries, by donations and by giving land for new public libraries. The monks have been very supportive (and have the means for it, which the BMA do not have).
102 Interview 5.
103 Interview 5.
104 A campaign for more libraries, see Libraries of today
105 Interview 4.
Special efforts are made to encourage children in their reading. As priority is given to increasing the number of library units, it is important to make people visit them. Cooperating with schools is an efficient way of reaching many children, which in turn will make the service known to their parents and other adults. There is a constant flow of newcomers entering the bus to see what it is like. When I asked the supervisor if they also support the ones already in the habit of reading, she said they had actually not considered that yet. Neither does there appear to be much promotion for the existing services. The bus is put on display during festivals and other events but, as far as I could gather, there was not much focus on finding a system for marketing the library’s everyday service in the communities.

Staff
Each bus has its own driver and librarian. Bus number 1, which is considerably larger than the others, has a typist, a janitor and a library assistant whom the other librarians can use. Unfortunately, out of 17 persons, only 4 were permanently employed. The other 13 are qualified and experienced but can only be employed temporarily as the government is still suffering from the economic crises and the demands of the IMF to straighten up the economy.

Librarians in Thailand have at least 4 years of university studies in Library Science. For a permanent position as a librarian they must pass an exam covering both general and library subjects, which is set by the BMA. All of them are women and rather young. The drivers are all men and although they occasionally fill in for the librarian when she is absent, they do not actively take part in the work. A couple of the librarians mentioned that they would like to have more staff on the buses, but the drivers would need training if they would be of any use.

Librarians are responsible for all the administration regarding acquisitions and circulation, and they work independently. They also weed out and mend or restore the books. In addition to reading services, the mobile library also

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106 Interview 5.
107 Interview 5. “there are no special priorities but ‘success in every way’.” Interview 15: “feels that it serves the purpose quite well as children are curious and the mobile helps instill the reading habit. Focus on instilling a reading habit in younger children.”
109 Which means that they have a lower salary (6,300 Bt -200 in taxes and no social security).
110 Interview 15. Drivers in Sweden have the training to use the catalogue and are familiar with the classification system.
provides promotional activities, e.g. storytelling, game and quiz programs and stage performances.

**Buses**

The buses are rather worn and have had the seats replaced by shelves. All of them have air-conditioning and a sofa at the back. Curtains keep the sun out and make the bus a comfortable place to be in the middle of the day. A video cassette recorder (VCR) has the screen turned to the outside to attract people to the bus. The buses are decorated individually and are quite different from each other. The 10 buses go to one or two service points each, five days a week. They stay for 2–4 hours in the service point so there is plenty of time to sit down and read.

Each bus has its own collection of books and the catalogue follows *numerus currens*. The newest bus, a donation from the Chartered Bank, has its catalogue computerized. Each bus has a collection of 2,900–11,700 books, with an average of 4,500, arranged according to the Dewey Decimal Classification system. It is possible to make interloans from the other buses. A bus would commence with a standard collection of about 3,000 books covering a wide range of subjects. About 50 percent of the budget is spent on children’s books, 20 percent on adult fiction and 30 percent on adult non-fiction. After that, the librarian is free to choose what to purchase.

Once a year all the librarians go to a bookshop and agree on some titles, but they are free to buy different titles for the different buses. Guidelines tell them not to buy books with subjects that are too violent or inappropriate in other ways. There are no explicit limitations as regards political or religious values, however books written and produced in Thailand are the most appreciated. For non-fiction, librarians sometimes have to purchase translated books but fiction is almost only Thai literature. The librarians will not buy comics (translated Japanese cartoons) but donated copies are kept on the shelves. The policy is to make a selection from the donations and keep these in the bus but not to record them in the catalogue.

The shelves are crammed with books and some users complain that the books are too tight to pull out, and that it is difficult to see the titles when there

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111 All in all about 60 service points. Wednesday to Sunday, 9–17. If someone would like the bus to be at a fair or other event, they try to use Mondays and Tuesdays and pay the librarians extra, but often the weekend is used, which means that some service points will more often be without service.

112 Meaning that each new book is “signed in” in running order, not according to name of author or title.

113 Interview 4.
are double rows. Each bus enlarges its stock with 481 books annually (not counting the donations) and used books too damaged to be repaired are weeded out; some of them are stored to be sent to small libraries desperately in need of material. The most extensively used categories include children’s non-fiction, adult’s fiction, cookery books and other how-to-do-it books.

Users
The most common user in a Thai library building is probably a well-educated adult, but in the Bangkok outskirts it is a child, or if an adult, a housewife.\textsuperscript{114} The supervisor says that it is difficult for children to come to the public library, but if you reach out to them, they will definitely use the service.\textsuperscript{115} She thinks children in the heart of the city have difficulties getting to the library because they have to be accompanied by adults and their parents are more inclined to buy books for them to read.\textsuperscript{116} On the outskirts of the city the children are the most active users of libraries. Statistics on the number of visits indicate approximately 433,000 visits, half of them made by children younger than 15 years. Statistics are always problematic and even more so with the bookmobiles where more people benefit from the service than the statistics tell us. Also, the librarians emphasize that the number of users and their loans in the bookmobiles cannot be compared with the numbers of the libraries as the libraries are much more established. The librarians are more interested in making people use the resources and have a pragmatic attitude. One of them says there are many children and adults, but that it is difficult to reach teenagers. She believes they have other interests than reading but may return as adults.\textsuperscript{117}

Rules
Library membership is required to check out books but anyone is welcome to enter and use the library at the service point.\textsuperscript{118} Members are allowed to check out two books for one week, and the librarians decide quite independently about exceptions to the number. There is a fine of 1 Bt per day and unit on late

\textsuperscript{114} Interview 5. The statistics tell us that in 2002 there were 2,270 members of which children made out a third. But statistics are not always reflecting reality in this case.
\textsuperscript{115} Interview 5.
\textsuperscript{116} Interview 5. “The parents can afford to buy books and do not have to depend on the library”.
\textsuperscript{117} Interview 4.
\textsuperscript{118} Membership costs 5/10 Bt annually, plus a deposit of 20/40 Bt.
returns (something which is rarely carried out). 119 Perhaps as in Sweden, because any late book is impossible to return until the bus returns, the praxis is not to fine the user from day one. It could also be that there are few cases of late books, and most members do bring them in to ask for a renewal. Any member who is responsible and careful with the books will be allowed to increase his/her number of books. Other than these exceptions, the rules are the same in all the public libraries, buildings as well as containers and buses.

To become a member, one must fill in an application, show a “Home Registration” form, some kind of identification, bring two photos and pay a membership fee of 10 Bt and a deposit of 40 Bt. 120 The deposit is to ensure there is money in case an item is lost or damaged, but it is refunded if the person ceases to be a member. The cost is equivalent to buying a small book or a hamburger meal and about the same as a mc(taxi)-driver’s daily earnings. These demands make it difficult for many people to become members, especially for children and poor people. The membership fee is not high and those who are members already maintain they are prepared to pay much more for the same service. Still, for a person who is not absolutely certain he/she will enjoy reading, or for a parent with an unpredictable and limited income, these costs may constitute a major barrier to giving the library a try – particularly in a culture where books and reading are not automatically highly valued and not taken for granted as a means of raising the quality of life.

Achievements
The schools invite cooperation with the bookmobile as school libraries specialize in textbooks for learning and want the children to know about other libraries as well. 121 The BMA are positive to this, thinking that if children use the library, they may bring along their parents as well. Visiting schools once a week is a new policy and well in line with the policy of the government who designated the year 2003 to be the year of learning.

Simply providing a bus makes a difference in these neighborhoods “as the children in communities reached by it would not have access to books or reading. It is very effective in building up, achieving the purpose.” 122 This

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119 Report of 2002, p. 28. “Member is allowed two books for seven days, after that 1Bt/day and item can be fined. If the book is damaged or lost it should be replaced with the cost for a new one.”
120 For children the amount is 5 plus 20 Bt.
121 In one day, we had 800 children visiting the bookmobile and talking to the librarian. It happens about once a month, the librarian said.
122 Interview 15.
makes the library available to people in the communities who would never think of entering a regular library. Another way to reach out is by going to schools, parks and special events when politicians try to attract more attention. On these occasions there are activities such as games, balloons, video, chess and badminton nearby and the people gathered become aware of the fact that there are mobile libraries and that they can influence their community leaders to request library services from the BMA.

The mobile library is special in promoting itself simply by going from place to place, and letting people know about it by being so obvious. It comes to the users instead of waiting for the (presumptive) users to discover and be attracted by it as is the case with the regular library. This makes the mobile library accessible to people who did not know they wanted the service, as well as to the people who cannot transport themselves far. Some communities are fortunate enough to have the bookmobile arriving on the weekend, making it accessible to more people than the weekly service points do. The service points are rarely altered – the bookmobile stays for a long time in one place and as each community still needs library services, the service is seldom shut down. A new service point can only be started if there is a new bus or a community that no longer wants service. If there are too few users, the BMA tries PR, flyers and loudspeakers and if that doesn’t work, they might change the service point.

There is a 5-year plan and a 1-year plan for library development by the BMA but no regular evaluations of the library service. In certain matters there is a questionnaire on the subject, but there is no yearly evaluation of how well the bookmobiles fulfill their goal. Instead, they rely on the users to tell the staff or fill in a form for the suggestion box. Sometimes users telephone the office with complaints, but most comments from the users to the staff seem to be positive.

All the librarians would like a public library law to enforce the efforts made by the politicians. There is a ruling for adult education which says that the Ministry of Education is responsible for providing public libraries. At the moment, politicians see the importance of the public library, but in practice there is not enough support from above and librarians feel that it is only words: “Sometimes the politicians use the libraries as their tool to gain popularity from the people but after they are elected they would forget about the promise”, one of them says.123 The supervisor says it is part of the National

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123 Interview 4. For having the bus one day while they run for election, they pay 500 Bt and have the bookmobile standing next to them when holding speeches.
Development Plan to promote reading and library support is essential in it, but it is just not the first priority. Perhaps politicians think that there are so many libraries (other than the public libraries) that there are enough to cover. If people are not happy with the public library, they can go to the National Library, school libraries or private libraries.”

There are hopes that legislation will improve the standard of the buses to avoid the bus breaking down on the way to the users, and perhaps raise salaries as well.

Additional comments from the staff
Some librarians say that the bookmobile and the public library building are equivalent of each other, they offer the same thing using exactly the same rules and fees. Others say that the bookmobile is different as it goes to the people and “is an attraction in itself” and promotes itself all the time. The best thing with the bookmobile, according to the librarians, is its outreach function – bringing books to people who would not come in touch with them otherwise and offering a substantial collection of titles. Nobody would say anything that was not good and they were of course happy to show the best parts of their work. I believe it is quite natural that one shows one’s successes rather than what is less satisfactory. Further, the temporarily employed librarians are probably eager to show that they are needed, even though they all knew I was not going to report anything.

When asking the librarians what improvements they would like, one said she would like the supervisor to come along and observe the work situation, as it varies from one location to another, and she would like the supervisors to have better knowledge of this. With better support from the BMA it would be possible to get more support from the community leaders who decide about the actual parking places. They supply electricity and that affects the chances to find food and toilets for the staff. Another librarian says there is too much work for one librarian, and she would like to have more trained staff. One librarian would like to have insurance for the bus, but she has been told that insurance would encourage the drivers to be careless. Also, computers are wanted, not for computerizing the catalogue but to encourage using technology. Computer drawing programs help people to learn coordination, be creative and thinking, one of them says. One step towards this would be to adapt the buses to have

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124 Interview 5.
125 Interview 4. Previously there was only male staff due to the lack of bathrooms.
126 Interview 15.
electricity without needing to connect a cable at every service point. Other hopes for the future included obtaining a higher salary and getting more men to enjoy reading fiction. The supervisor would like to have more public libraries but says it is too expensive to buy land for that, so she is hoping for good cooperation with the temples that have large properties.

All in all, it seems the librarians are quite pragmatic and their main concern is to make more people enjoy reading. More support from the BMA, community leaders and local politicians would be appreciated, and they would like a law to make the importance of the library more evident to others. More money would make the bus more reliable and the collection of books even better. The UNESCO public library manifesto is not familiar to the staff and none of them think that the membership requirements of the BMA bookmobiles are problematic.

The librarians feel appreciated by the users and have many examples of how their recommendations have been well received. Whether they offer their assistance or wait for the user to approach them varies; one of them noted that the more educated the user, the more demanding the questions asked.

If the bookmobile service was shut down, several librarians are certain users would stop reading and children would be the ones to suffer most. Fortunately, there are no signs that the service is threatened.

Summary
Even though the bookmobiles are not sufficient to provide library service to all parts of Bangkok, the ten buses stop at around 60 service points and are considered a well-functioning alternative to the buildings that can’t be afforded. The BMA sees bookmobiles as a good way to reach the users (especially children) and there are no plans to cut down the service as they find bookmobiles efficient. Librarians are satisfied and find that the buses give service equivalent to, or better than, the public library buildings.

Interviews with Users
To start with, I asked the users about their family situation, occupation and when they usually took time to read. Out of the 16 users, there were 2 girls, 5

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127 Interview 6 and 16.
128 Interview 5.
129 Interview 6.
boys, 4 housewives, 2 retired women, 1 female teacher, 1 male driver and 1 male salesman. The impression was that all the adults were well educated, the retired ladies used to work as a teacher and a social worker, two of the housewives volunteered in a day-center for school dropouts. All of them read at home, often at night, which corresponds to my impression that even in a big city like Bangkok, extremely few people had the habit of reading while waiting in official places, like stations or on trains.

Why do they come?

One housewife talked about how she liked to get out of the house and meet other people;\(^{130}\) other users mentioned pleasure and/or to gain more knowledge and their wanting to introduce books and reading to their children.\(^ {131}\) Students came for pleasure as well as to find material for school assignments.\(^ {132}\) Most of them said they enjoy reading but cannot get hold of enough books at home or through buying.\(^ {133}\)

To the question “What do you usually do during your visit?” they told me how they enjoy fiction, cookbooks, history, tourism, novels, magazines, Chinese fiction, thrillers, cartoons, fairytales and non-fiction picture books. It is all very diverse and the only thing the users have in common is that they are frequent readers who make use of as many books as they are allowed. One stays in the bus to read as long as it remains, another comes to pick up new books but leaves as soon as possible as he finds it too crowded to stay for long.\(^ {134}\)

“Do you know what you want to borrow, do you find new things by yourself or do you like help?” From those that answered this question, I found 10 persons like to browse the shelves themselves and 7 of them sometimes ask the librarian for help.\(^ {135}\) The children ask for help to find material for their school homework.\(^ {136}\) Adults are mainly interested in finding out if there are any new items, but they can also be looking for a book in a series or by a certain author.\(^ {137}\) This is even more clear when looking at the replies to the question about service: “What can the staff do for you?[...]Do you ask them

\(^{130}\) Interview 1.
\(^{131}\) Interview 3, 7, 8 and 10.
\(^{132}\) Interview 2 and 18.
\(^{133}\) Interview 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 12 and 17.
\(^{134}\) Interview 2 and 3.
\(^{135}\) Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 17 and 18.
\(^{136}\) Interview 2 and 18.
\(^{137}\) Interview 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 17.
questions? [...]”. For this question too, the users replied how they want to know about new books and ask for titles from other bookmobiles. One woman was specific in telling me how she sometimes asks for more information about Down’s syndrome.138 Some people mentioned that they ask the librarian to buy new titles that they might have seen in the shops.139 After two users told me that they were reserving a book for the next week, I added the question “Do you sometimes make reservations?” but the others responded that the rules did not permit it. One woman said that if she sees an interesting book being checked out, she goes directly to that person and swaps books after a few days.140 I asked whether they used other material than books, as the bookmobiles kept books, magazines and newspapers. Magazines were popular and one man read the newspaper sporadically,141 but all the adults had their own subscription to a daily newspaper at home. Having a newspaper subscription is quite a clear indication that the informants are pretty well off – at least compared to what the BMA says is the target group: the slum communities. The bookmobiles go to communities quite different from each other but it is possible the informants I had were more enthusiastic about reading than the average user.

Library habits
There were a number of questions to find out more about the library habits of the informants. One was “For how long have you been a member?”. Most of them have been members for 1–3 years, one for 8 years,142 another for 10143 (from the very start of that service point).144 One person has been a member for 4 months and used the public library in the place he lived before then.145 I deleted the question on how often they visited the library when I realized that the time one can keep a book is 7 days. This made most people very active users as they borrow a new book when returning the first, and continue to visit once a week.

Other questions to find out how familiar they are with libraries were ”Have you been to another library?” “Other libraries are larger and have more books, why do you come to the mobile library?” “What is the difference between this

138 Interview 7.
139 Interview 3, 7, 9, 10 and 17.
140 Interview 17.
141 Interview 10.
142 Interview 18.
143 Interview 17.
144 Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17 and 18.
145 Interview 3.
library and other libraries?” and “Do you think it is the same service in a Public Library building and in the mobile library?” Users of all ages mentioned the National Library as a library they use for pleasure reading.\textsuperscript{146} The children all used school libraries and could compare the bookmobile to it.\textsuperscript{147} One girl mentioned how it had been closed for several months as the teacher-librarian went for special training. She complained that even before it was shut, it was only possible to use in the mornings and the lunch break, and that the teacher-librarian did not have time to help to the same extent as the librarian in the mobile library. Although the mobile is smaller, its collection is more diverse and up-to-date and is thereby of greater value to her. She also likes how they sometimes turn on the radio. The school brought her to see “a large library with computers” and she would like to use one like that.\textsuperscript{148} Another student was older (14 years old) and said she needed both libraries for studies: the school library during the week and the bookmobile on the weekends. Observing her I found she also needed the bookmobile for her extensive reading of fiction. She was very familiar with the mobile library since she had been a user for 8 years and it was probably easier for her to find her material there than in the school library where many students need the same material. Her reasons for using the mobile were that it is open on the weekend; she can find her way around in the shelves; it has a better collection and she can get help there.\textsuperscript{149} The young boys were interested in the cartoons and “fun books” that are not available to them elsewhere. Some of them mentioned the climate, saying that it is nice and cool inside the bus. One preferred the school library (because of its climate) but comes along with his friends.\textsuperscript{150} In general, it seems like the school libraries are for educational purposes. I was told that they only have textbooks and that the collection is rather worn. Two boys said that the National Library is large and although they like it, one prefers the mobile (it is cosier) and the other, the school library (more familiar and user-friendly to him). These seemed to be the favorite libraries because they are quiet, cool and the boys can find the books they want in them.\textsuperscript{151} The adult users have used school libraries when young, the National Library during University studies, but found it difficult to use a public library

\textsuperscript{146} Interview 9, 10 and 11.  
\textsuperscript{147} Interview 2, 11, 14 and 18.  
\textsuperscript{148} Interview 2.  
\textsuperscript{149} Interview 18.  
\textsuperscript{150} Interview 14.  
\textsuperscript{151} Interview 11.
where they live. Only one of them knew where the closest public library is located so there is no alternative between choosing a library building some distance away or the bookmobile in the local community. One user said she had not been to other libraries but used to rent books in the bookshop before. When the adults were asked to compare the mobile library to previous experiences, one person who has used special libraries, a university library and the National Library, said that in the bookmobile books are easier to find and it is informal and more user-friendly. The one person aware of the public library explained the differences between them by saying that the bus is for pleasure and the building for educational purposes. Other opinions were “the National Library has a larger collection but it is difficult with parking there”; that the mobile library’s collection of books is better than the public library’s, and “as the service is the same, this close one is better”. Other users said the greatest difference is that the mobile library reaches the users, “without it there would be nothing to read” and “before I had to go, now it comes to me”.

The word “convenience” was repeated continuously when I asked why they use the mobile library and the difference between the bookmobile and other libraries. I gather they mean convenience in distance. The reasons they use the bookmobile to find reading material is closeness, and not finding good reading, for free, elsewhere.

From the question “How did you come to know about the mobile library?” I learned that there were two common ways of finding out about the library service. Half of the informants had been told about it by relatives (often the children knew before the adults did) and the other half had seen the bus and entered it out of curiosity. One woman saw a sign saying that the community would start with library service and came to see what it was.
To the question “What did you do before the mobile library came here?” one user said he used to buy everything, and another said she only read the newspaper but now “all kinds of books”. More people replied to the next question: “What do you think you would do if it stopped coming?” The man was prepared to buy everything again and the woman said she would feel lonely and go back to reading the newspaper, as she likes books but only if they are free. Some people replied that it would be expensive to have to buy books again. Others said they would use the school library, the Public Library, or rent from a bookshop. One person said it would be very sad but she would reread the books she already owns. Another would read less as she already pays for a newspaper and could not afford to buy books as well. No one was prepared to swap books with friends and neighbors.

The Impact of the Library

I wanted to find out what the mobile library has brought to the users that they do not get elsewhere by asking: “How important is the library for your reading habits?” and “How important is the library for your information about what is going on in Bangkok, Thailand, the world?”. The replies told me that some users felt their reading had increased at the same time as they saved money. Some were content with being able to save money, others were thankful to find books that are difficult to get hold of elsewhere. One user said he still buys books for his children, but spends less per month. For information about what is going on in society, all of them rely on the radio, newspapers or television. No one thought it important that the mobile library carries newspapers; neither have the exhibitions mattered all that much. As one woman said: “I depend on the newspaper and television for that – the bus comes once a week but for current events I need it daily”. As even the poorest usually have access to radio and television, this could indicate that it is more valuable to the users if

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165 Interview 10.
166 Interview 1.
167 Interview 10 and 1 (who was also the one to enjoy coming out and meeting the neighbors in the bus).
168 Interview 2, 3, 7, 8, 12, 17 and 18.
169 Interview 9.
170 Interview 13.
171 Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17 and 18.
172 Interview 1, 2, 7, 8 and 13. Compared to when they bought everything themselves.
173 Interview 3, 8, 12, 13 and 17. Non-fiction and older titles are difficult to find – the latest fiction can be rented in the bookshops.
174 Interview 3. A book costs 20–130 Bt, he spends 300 Bt/month on average. Harry Potter costs “300 Bt for a copy – 1,000 Bt for a book”, according to the librarians in Chiang Mai.
175 Interview 13.
the library uses its resources for better service, rather than for information on social issues.

I also asked whether they knew of people who do not visit the mobile library and the reasons for them not to do so. The most elaborate answer came from a retired teacher who summarized it as “due to three reasons: they do not know the value of reading, or low-educated people, busy earning their living”.

It seems lack of reading interest, as well as not having time were common reasons. One user had tried to introduce her neighbors to the library but they were not interested.

Another said that men especially are not interested in books but have other hobbies. I tried to find out if they meant others do not have time for reading or if the problem is finding time to go to the library. Two persons were clear, saying that others cannot come to the library during the day as they are at work. At one service point there used to be many members from a large office nearby, but when the business went bankrupt, they stopped coming.

Library Service
A number of questions were asked to find out users’ opinions on the service that they receive. The questions concerned the time when the bus comes, how long it stays, where it stops, the rules for borrowing a book and their opinion of the collection and service from the staff. Finally they could add what they thought was missing in the library service.

Out of all the replies about the staff only one user was not enthusiastic – a member who had not yet approached the librarian. The others described their three different librarians as smiling, service-minded and good help but often occupied. These users are familiar with the library and said they try themselves before they ask the librarian for help. If there is a crowd waiting for help one person said she would sometimes go home and return a little later. She nevertheless considers the librarian to be very good and is impressed by her. All of the users are satisfied and said they receive good help when they ask for

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176 Interview 12.
177 Interview 13.
178 Interview 16: Men prefer to repair things and gamble, only borrow “how-to-do-it” books, she says.
179 Interview 1 and 8.
180 Interview 10.
181 Interview 12.
182 Interview 9.
it. Two users mentioned how they receive books from the other buses if what they are looking is not on that particular bus.\textsuperscript{183}

The informants were quite happy with the time the bookmobile gives service. Regardless of “their” day, Saturday was the best day for all as “a working day would not be good”.\textsuperscript{184} Those who had the book bus on other days said they would like to be able to bring schoolchildren or husbands, something that is not possible at the moment.\textsuperscript{185} I asked one of the Saturday visitors who would not come on a weekday, whether service after five o’clock would be suitable and she said she would be willing to come if the bus came at night.\textsuperscript{186}

From the very beginning, the informants described the distance to the service point in terms of the time it takes to go there. The reasons why they liked the current points were that these were next to a community day-center or a market place, or that the point had been the same for a long time and was well known.\textsuperscript{187} Some users lived so close they could point out their houses, others had 2–5 or 10–15 minutes walk.\textsuperscript{188} One woman lived 10 minutes away and would not be willing to walk any further.\textsuperscript{189} Another one walks 10 minutes and would use her bike if it were 30 minutes walking – further than that would not make her go at all.\textsuperscript{190} The girl said it takes her 10 minutes if she doesn’t run, and twice the distance would be fine as she can borrow a bike.\textsuperscript{191} Some people use their motorcycles already.\textsuperscript{192} If the location would be changed, people had very different opinions on how far away would be acceptable. One person was prepared to walk up to five minutes – one block – but no further;\textsuperscript{193} another said it depended on the traffic and yet another would ride the motorcycle up to one hour each way.\textsuperscript{194} The old lady did not mind the location of the stop as she already has a special agreement: the bus picks her up outside her house so that

\textsuperscript{183} Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17 and 18.
\textsuperscript{184} Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10 and 13.
\textsuperscript{185} Interview 2: any time other than school hours would be fine, and interview 18: wanted the bookmobile to supplement in the weekend when the school was closed. Interview 7: was not happy with the time (Thursday morning) as she wanted children to be able to visit after school. Her comment was that 12.00–17.00 would be much better for the community.
\textsuperscript{186} Interview 17.
\textsuperscript{187} Interview 8, 10 and 16. That the stop had been the same for a long time could also be an argument to change.
\textsuperscript{188} Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17 and 18.
\textsuperscript{189} Interview 1.
\textsuperscript{190} Interview 17.
\textsuperscript{191} Interview 2.
\textsuperscript{192} Interview 7, 10, 13 and 17.
\textsuperscript{193} Interview 9.
\textsuperscript{194} Interview 13 and 3.
she can visit the library without having to walk.\textsuperscript{195} The question if the users would visit the mobile library more often if the distance were shorter, was not asked as they had related how they came every week to return old books and borrow new items.

Regarding the collection, the amount of books and the distribution over the subjects, it seemed people were content irrespective of which bus they visited.\textsuperscript{196} Although one user had a special interest in Chinese fiction, he still considered the amount sufficient and thought there was a good spread of books to satisfy children, men and women.\textsuperscript{197} The women who like fiction were the most satisfied.\textsuperscript{198} A mother said she would like more books for children of all ages as she feels the selection of children’s books focused too much on the very young children.\textsuperscript{199} Several women had tried to suggest new titles but were given the reply “there is no money”.\textsuperscript{200} Some users wanted more magazines but also acknowledged that there were new books every month.\textsuperscript{201}

One has to be a member of the library to check out books.\textsuperscript{202} The membership fee was considered “OK” and “perfect, not more and not less” by the two girls.\textsuperscript{203} Adults found it cheap or very cheap.\textsuperscript{204} One man would happily pay up to 100 Bt, twice the current fee.\textsuperscript{205} Members can keep a book for seven days. If the bus cancels a visit, the staff tries to give notice so that the members can check out enough reading to last them for two weeks. There is no fine for late books if the bus doesn’t arrive when it should. When the users were asked if they were content with a seven-day loan, all of them agreed it was a good period of time. One person was not prepared to have less as she does not have much time for reading.\textsuperscript{206} One said that it is good because it allows others access to the books too.\textsuperscript{207} Another said giving more time to people who are not responsible would not be good.\textsuperscript{208} It is always possible to ask for more time, a privilege used by some members. No one had any experience of being fined for

\textsuperscript{195} Interview 12.
\textsuperscript{196} The collections of the buses differ between 2,900−11,700 items.
\textsuperscript{197} Interview 10.
\textsuperscript{198} Interview 1, 7, 8, 9, 12 and 17.
\textsuperscript{199} Interview 13.
\textsuperscript{200} Interview 1, 3, 9 and 17.
\textsuperscript{201} Interview 1, 8 and 9.
\textsuperscript{202} See “Interviews with Staff: Rules”.
\textsuperscript{203} Interview 2 and 18.
\textsuperscript{204} Interview 1, 3, 10 and others.
\textsuperscript{205} Interview 3.
\textsuperscript{206} Interview 13.
\textsuperscript{207} Interview 12.
\textsuperscript{208} Interview 9.
late returns. Some of them smiled and said they are “special users” and that the librarian will not fine them.209 These were the same people who told me they could borrow a larger amount of books than the rules stipulate. According to the rules, each member can check out two books but some of them “use” other memberships in their family to have a larger amount.210 It is of course difficult to determine if a member borrows books for other family members or uses the quota for himself. One user checked out eleven to twelve books and the librarian said there was nothing she could do about it.211 On the other hand, responsible users are excepted from ordinary rules according to the unwritten rule: the more responsible the person, the more books he or she may borrow. One member said the amount was enough as she could have as many as she wants.212 The newest member was satisfied to have been allowed six books from the start. She negotiated with the librarian and they agreed on the number together, although she would like to borrow eight or ten. She thinks she has just about enough reading to last her through the week as she subscribes to magazines and switches books with another member, all in all a total of ten to twelve books each week.213 Still, every member had his/her own quota of books. Some were satisfied; others wanted more than they were allowed.214

Other Comments

When the users were asked to mention the best thing with the mobile library they said “the collection”, “knowledge”, “close”, “friendly librarian” and “good climate”. The opinions were that the collection was substantial and diverse. Six people said the collection was the best thing, 3 appreciated the climate – that it was cool and sometimes the radio was turned on.215

Not many wanted to say anything that was not good about the bookmobile. From other questions I could make out the following: “the bus does not always

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209 Interview 8, 9, 17 and 18.
210 Although people were not prepared to share books with their friends if the bus stopped coming, some of them tell me they switch books with family members between the library visits. Some of them borrow as many books as all the members in the family would be allowed together. The young girl shares the whole family quota with her brother, a mother shares with her daughter, three others borrow books they think their children (and perhaps spouse) would enjoy, and a teacher brings books to the other staff in the school.
211 Interview 16.
212 Interview 9.
213 Interview 12.
214 Interview 2: she said she could have five but would rather have ten, if it was possible, interview 1: “two is enough but more would be better”.
215 Interview 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 18.
“the shelves are cramped – it is difficult to see titles and pull out books” 216 “too crowded to stay for long” 217 “should have more books” 218 and “it is better with the weekend when people are at home”. 219 Some said “nothing” and one user pointed out “it is not for me to find fault”. 220 When asked if there was any service they were lacking, the replies were that it is good the way it is. 221 One man said, “this is OK for small areas”. 222 One user who wanted more books for children of all ages said she thought there was too much fiction and would like a more diverse collection, for example more literature on business and general knowledge – that is, more of non-fiction but not too academic. 223 One woman complained that there was not enough light to sit and read in the bus. 224

There was also a question on what they would like for the bookmobile in the future, if it were up to them to decide. One suggestion was to have the books arranged in a more accessible way. 225 This was no criticism of the classification system, but a comment that too many of the shelves are crammed with books. It is difficult to see the titles when there are double rows and the books are packed too tightly to pull out easily. She would also like the bus to be bigger. Other users wanted the BMA to weed out the old books and change the collection very frequently so there are new books all the time. 226 A girl asked for better classification; her school library is precisely organized according to subjects and age recommendations. 227 One man asked for the bus to come every week, and preferably on the weekend. 228 A woman asked for Internet. 229 The most common comments were that users wanted the BMA to supply services more regularly (by providing better buses) and to more places. 230 Several users would like more books and larger buses to have “more of the same thing” and some wished there would be enough buses to give

216 Interview 10 and 18 had complaints about the service being cancelled too often.
217 Interview 1 and 18.
218 Interview 3.
219 Interview 11, 12, 17 and 18.
220 Interview 8 and 10.
221 Interview 12.
222 Interview 9, 12, 13 and 18.
223 Interview 3.
224 Interview 13.
225 Interview 9.
226 Interview 1.
227 Interview 11, 17 and 18.
228 Interview 2.
229 Interview 10.
230 Interview 7.
231 Interview 3, 7, 10 and 12.
service to everyone in the weekends, when people can come to the library.\textsuperscript{232} Another user would like more books, more shelves, more space and more seats to sit and read.\textsuperscript{233}

To find out whether the users were prepared to travel a longer distance if they could have a library building, open every day, I asked if they would prefer the bus (as it is today) or a library building at twice the distance. Some users answered that they would prefer the building,\textsuperscript{234} and twice the distance was not very far for anyone in the study. One older woman would not be interested in visiting the library if the building was further than 10 minutes away, as she had the bookmobile at a comfortable distance.\textsuperscript{235} Some women said they would survey both and go to the best one and another would use both.\textsuperscript{236} Her explanation was “Each has a different atmosphere, each has its advantage”.\textsuperscript{237} For the old lady, the bus is outstanding because it picks her up at her door.\textsuperscript{238} To one person it “doesn’t matter if it is a bus or a building as long as it is open and in a distance I can reach”.\textsuperscript{239}

There was also room for the informants to add anything they wanted to tell me. A man said he would like more people to read since society has turned to focus on material development and not development of the mind!\textsuperscript{240} A girl said she would like a library next to a “hands-on-museum” she had been to. In the museum, children could try scientific experiments and she would like an adjacent library to read about the experiments.\textsuperscript{241} The teenager enjoyed being so familiar with the place.\textsuperscript{242} A young woman said she would like the mobile library to come to every province in Thailand to provide everyone with knowledge.\textsuperscript{243}

The young boys gave me a chance to ask some users why they were not members. The youngest three did not know about membership but were interested when told about it.\textsuperscript{244} The other two did “not come so often”.\textsuperscript{245} One

\textsuperscript{232} Interview 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13.
\textsuperscript{233} Interview 18.
\textsuperscript{234} Interview 3, 7, 9, 10 and 13.
\textsuperscript{235} Interview 9.
\textsuperscript{236} Interview 1, 2, 8, 17 and 18.
\textsuperscript{237} Interview 1. The teenager wanted both as well, arguing that a larger library, open every day, would be very good “but this is better [as it has books] for both studies and amusement”.
\textsuperscript{238} Interview 12.
\textsuperscript{239} Interview 17.
\textsuperscript{240} Interview 3.
\textsuperscript{241} Interview 2.
\textsuperscript{242} Interview 18.
\textsuperscript{243} Interview 7.
\textsuperscript{244} Interview 14.
\textsuperscript{245} Interview 11.
woman said that because there is a bus, she goes, otherwise she would never bother: distance is what matters to her.\textsuperscript{246} The teenager said it is sometimes difficult to keep the time.\textsuperscript{247} A man said it is part of his routines; every Saturday means cleaning the house, watching television and going to the mobile library.\textsuperscript{248}

Summary
Both staff and users are quite satisfied with the service as it is. The staff said they offer a library service as good as the public libraries, but some of them would like improved working conditions. Users were very happy to have the service, and appreciated above all the closeness and the substantial collections. Some of them said the library made it cheaper to read, for others the presence of the library was the determining factor for reading at all. Many of them would like the bookmobile to come every week, have more books and more space. Distance seemed to be much more important to the mobile library users than the selection of books or the environment in the bus.

\textsuperscript{246} Interview 13.
\textsuperscript{247} Interview 18.
\textsuperscript{248} Interview 3.
Discussion

In this chapter I conclude by presenting the strengths of the mobile library service, discuss the results of interviews and observations, and give my recommendations for future work.

Strengths of a Mobile Library
The most conspicuous difference between a mobile library and a library building is that the mobile library goes to the user instead of vice versa. In this way it reaches immobile user-groups (mainly children and the elderly) as well as people who are not prepared to take themselves to a library. Other differences are that mobile libraries are more flexible in their outreach area and can more easily adjust the service to the users’ needs. The librarian and the users learn to know each other in a way which is quite different from that prevailing in the regular libraries. The mobile library is small and cozy as opposed to the spacious but anonymous buildings, something that may make the users feel more welcome and, additionally, can provide an appreciated place to meet one’s neighbors. Moreover, the mobile library draws attention to itself, provides good PR for library services and can attract potential users who had never before thought of going to the library. This has all been said in many of the works about bookmobile services mentioned in the section,”Previous Research”. I have not compared my results with the situation in library buildings, but can ascertain that what I have seen agrees with other research on bookmobiles.

Both users and librarians in my study agree that the service is very friendly and on a more personal level than in other libraries. That is not the reason, however, for the users to come to the mobile instead of the branch library. They come because they enjoy reading and through the bookmobile they have access to many more titles than they do in the shops. Users prefer to browse through the shelves on their own and rarely ask for help or advice. They feel free to ask questions but seldom wonder about anything other than whether
there are new books. In general, there is a lot of respect for authorities and users are content the way things are at present.

The combination of reaching more users, promoting the library by being visible in the streets and being flexible (participating in festivals and activities) makes bookmobiles a convenient tool for a nation to influence its citizens. Thailand has previously used big campaigns to reinforce an idea of what the common Thai culture is. This was done in the 1950s when it was decided that the whole population should become literate, which is not a particularly Thai issue, but what happened was that anyone who did not learn to read and write Thai was not qualified to be a citizen. Today there are four different levels of citizenship, which give people different rights to ownership, elections and higher education.²⁴⁹ When I asked if the library had books in “other languages”, I was always told about English books and once about the Muslim shelf they had, but never about the minority languages. Not even in the provincial library in northern Thailand were they interested in providing books in the local tribal languages. Librarians in the north seem to take for granted that anyone who reads, has learned to read Thai. If libraries are used by leaders as a way to reach out to the population, whether it be for the spreading of ideas or for general knowledge and raising the intellectual standard of a nation, the libraries have to be well organized and attractive to visitors. It would be strange if the present Thai government would not be interested in using libraries in this way – the past century has been unstable politically, to say the least, and Prime Minister Thaksin is enforcing a new era with a strong hand. Thaksin has had strong opinions on several issues and has been the subject of a number of articles on Asian politics over recent years. He is a strong leader and people all over the world are waiting to see if the changes he has made have been for the good or to the detriment of Thailand. I sometimes got the impression that the library staff I met in Thailand had very good intentions and were enthusiastic about the work, but imparted nevertheless a somewhat sleepy attitude when it came to evaluating and developing the library service. It is impossible for an outsider to make out from a short visit if this was due to little contact between the organizers and the performers (staff) of the library work, or an effect of a different culture and philosophy. In any case, there seemed to be a framework for good library work that could be used much more efficiently than it is. As it was, nobody could tell me if the service had improved in quality. According to

²⁴⁹ For people of minority groups, it is sometimes difficult to prove if they are from the Thai villages or refugees from neighboring countries. Dr. Suwit 2003-01-27, Ms. Judy 2003-01-30.
Höglund & Klingberg, quality in library service demands a never-ending circle of evaluation – feedback – planning – decisions – performance – evaluation, to maintain a certain level of standard.\textsuperscript{250} Quality is only reached when aims and evaluations are clarified in operative terms. Perhaps a system of evaluation in Bangkok would capture the opinions of the users, as their relationship to their local librarian may make it difficult to be openly critical. The supervisor said that “the goal is to make public libraries accessible to everyone” and they try their best to improve results by raising the budget every year.

The Objectives of the Bookmobiles
This thesis started out asking what the objectives of the mobile library of Bangkok were, and to what extent they were achieved. Unfortunately, these objectives were written in terms of a rather vague aim for the mobile service, namely “to give library service to everyone in Bangkok”. The BMA does strive to increase library services and to reach out to all groups of people, but progress takes time and there is still a long way to go. The aim “to reach everyone” is difficult for any library to achieve, even in places that have more economic resources. What one could find in Bangkok, however, was joy and pride in achieving what they do with very little means. That they still do not reach everywhere – or even the target groups – probably depends on more than funding. My opinion is that many more people could enjoy the present services, with just a little more work on PR and information about the library’s existence. Even though it was 30 years ago, I believe Möhlenbrock is right in that since a mobile library draws attention to itself wherever it goes: it is “twice as important that the service is good”.\textsuperscript{251}

To “reach out” could also be said to be to “give people access” to the library. As has been mentioned above, access depends on several different things. Obstacles may be distance, opening hours, the expense for using or getting to the library, or a feeling that it is not relevant. Merely the thought of the time it takes just to get there can be enough to make some people stay at home. At the moment, the opening hours of the BMA bookmobiles make them available to housewives and young children, but not many other people. The BMA has tried to adjust to the needs of the users by offering library services on the weekends and letting staff have their free days on Mondays and

\textsuperscript{250} Höglund, Anna-Lena, & Klingberg, Christer, 2001, \textit{Strategisk medieplanering för folkbibliotek}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{251} Möhlenbrock, 1974, p. 17.
Tuesdays instead. Still, if the library only stays open until 16.00, all people bound by office hours are deprived of the opportunity to use the library. Being open from 16.00 to 19.00 – something users expressly wanted – would make the library much more available in the communities (without the inconveniences of working at night). Research on children and reading has shown how important it is that books are easily available and introduced early to children to give the most positive effects. Also, the staff claim that the stop at the service point is long in order to let people stay in the library and get used to the books and to reading. Of course that provides very good service to the users who are not members. However, the observations I made during the days I went with the bus indicated that very few people stayed for more than ten minutes. I had the impression that most users came to return their books, had a look at the shelves and rather quickly found some new reading material to check out. What I saw might have been exceptional, but I would be happy to hear if the BMA could investigate further users’ opinions on evening service and shorter stops.

The reception area of a public library building is about the radius of one kilometer and for a mobile unit only half a kilometer, according to Höglund & Klingberg.252 In Bangkok, distance is measured in how long it takes to get from one place to another, and from my informants I learned that two of them traveled for 10–15 minutes, the others for 1–5 minutes, which is probably not further than 500 meters away. Heavy traffic, heat, long days at work, a culture of not walking very far and a culture of socializing rather than reading, are all problems the bookmobile service is affected by and it is important to keep the distance to the bus as short as possible. Geographical distance is crucial for the users: if the bookmobiles stayed for an hour at each place, they would reach 2–3 times as many places in the same neighborhoods as they do today. Currently, the bus stops 2–4 hours in about 60 places and I think this could be changed to service at 120–180 places without too much difficulty. Every one of the informants mentioned “convenience” when I asked about the benefits of having the mobile service. Some compared the mobile service to having to go across town to get to a library; most compared to the time when they had to buy their reading material. For them, there is greater convenience in having a library nearby, all for free, as well as being able to find a large selection of titles and even older titles. The shorter distance not only makes it more

252 Höglund & Klingberg, 2001, p. 58.
comfortable for the users but clearly increases their numbers. A mobile unit will create curiosity and people will visit it – at least once – to find out what it is. To stop at different service points in the same community would probably increase the number of users in a simple way, but it is a decision that has to be made by the administrators at the BMA in agreement with the community leaders.

Access also concerns being able to find what one needs in the library: how the shelves are arranged, how they and the books are marked, and whether there is staff at hand to help. Something that was obvious – and pointed out by staff as well as users – was the fact that the bookshelves in the bookmobiles were too full to display the books. Double rows, hiding the back row completely, were not exceptional. Sometimes the books were so tight it was difficult to pull them out for a closer look. Other than discarding damaged volumes, there is no policy for weeding out books. None of the users would want a smaller number of books and said spontaneously that they think new books and a good collection are important, yet they complain about the way things are now. Weeding books out and having them on display increases the number of loans. Systematic weeding out is necessary for a library and if one looks at the figures of the BMA bookmobiles for 2002, the number of loans does not at all correspond to the size of the collections. A shared catalogue and premises for storing books would give the users access to a larger selection as well as better use of the books in the buses.

Another aspect of access is the “small-but-cozy” atmosphere that makes children come on their own and stay to read in the bus. This may be due to the welcoming attitude of the librarian, but is probably more an effect of the premises – the bus being a small and unusual place. I found that children stayed longer than adults and played with their friends inside. Some children were reading on the floor while the librarian and other adults stepped around them not to disturb. Other children were playing quite loudly. Adults might feel some pressure to become members after a while, but children seemed to enjoy the library without worries.

Other inconveniences that have to be considered when discussing accessibility are, according to Priwatrworawute, the lack of knowledge of the library and lack of reading habits. Therefore, to make people come to the library, they have to be informed about the existing services; further, libraries

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must provide what the users need and overcome the lack of reading interest by creative reading promotion. From experiences in Sweden, we know that a recognizable signal from the bookmobile alerts more people to the bus. It is also important the users feel that the librarian tries to adjust the collection to their demands and listens to their suggestions. Most important of the suggestions by Priwatworawute, is to overcome the lack of reading interest. After all, reading as a common pastime has a short history in Thailand. Bangkok is a big city but, like many cities, many people stay in the area they live and can be quite separated from what the city can offer. It takes a lot of time to get anywhere in the hot and crowded traffic and just making a living takes all the time and effort for many people. As accommodation is hard to find, a lot of people stay with their relatives (some only during the week and go to their village in the weekend) and socialize on the street corners and in the small restaurants. There are not many chances to pick up a book and read under these conditions. Basic education is broad but owning books does not seem common. Those who can afford to buy books manage to satisfy their needs without a library, so the real challenge for the library is to create reading habits among the poor. There are certainly some groups that are more attracted to, or interested in, the library service. My study indicates that well educated, middle-class women dominate the group of users who visited the bus and were interested in talking about it with me. These people may be considered potential users who simply need a library nearby to use it. Their neighbors who were not interested may be among those who would come if the library had other forms for its service, or, of course, they may not be interested at all.

Opinions of Staff and Users
Both staff and users were quite happy with the way the bookmobiles functioned today. The staff had some tangible proposals for better working conditions, a higher salary and more support from the BMA and from politicians. One of the most simple demands, in my opinion, was that the supervisor should go along in the bus every now and then and then to observe the different service points and get a better idea of what the working conditions are like. Users had many comments about the service, and although it was evident that my informants were very happy and grateful for it, there were still some

suggestions for improvements. The request I take most seriously was that the bookmobile did not come as often as it was supposed to, and users asked for it to turn up more regularly. Sometimes they were told in advance that the bus was to participate in promotion the week after, but sometimes it would break down on the way or land in traffic problems. With better buses, some of that uncertainty would be dissipated.

Among the users, all the children were familiar with school libraries but preferred the bookmobile because it was not only for studies and had newer books. The adults had usually been to other libraries (in school or for higher studies) but said that either those libraries were only for facts, or, like the National Library, it was too far away. One person used another library parallel to the bookmobile; for the others, the bookmobile provided their only opportunity to borrow books. Their previous visits to other libraries made it possible for them to compare the bookmobile to other libraries.

Before the informants became members of the mobile library, they read less, or bought/rented the books they read. For some users, the big change in conjunction with the mobile library was that they now save money compared to when they bought all their reading material. For others, the change is that they have started to read more, and that they can re-read old favorites that cannot be found in the shops. At least one woman claimed that she only read the newspaper before, but has now started to enjoy the company of a book for relaxation. She says this has enriched her life. A number of my adult informants said they borrow books hoping that their children will acquire a reading habit and that it is a way to support them in their education. When I asked the users what they think they would do if the bus stopped coming, I was told that most of them would go back to the way things were before the communities received library service. I would have thought that some of them would go back to buying all their reading material while that others had learned to know other “readers” to swap books with, but none of them thought of borrowing books from friends as an alternative. Most of them mentioned that it would be expensive without the library, but the fact that they thought they would buy their reading material could be a sign that they still could afford to do so if they saw no other way. One person said that she would definitely stop reading other things than the newspaper, which is identical to a comment from a user of the Stockholm book boat.255 If they could choose

between having the personal service of a bookmobile once a week, or a small public library building at twice the distance, most of them would prefer the building. They expressed how they would appreciate more books, and more space, and that it would be convenient to have a library that was open every day. A few of the informants, both young and old, said that they would use both because they would be different, or, that they would like to “investigate” which library had the best collection of books before choosing one.

The supervisor of the librarians had big hopes for the future. Her visions are needed to lift ideas and create change. She did not comment on the existing service much but seemed to be striving for a better future with a higher level of technology and more cooperation between the BMA libraries. Users expressed a wish for “more of the same”. From neither users nor staff could I get any idea of what changes have taken place during the ten years of mobile library services in Bangkok. I had hoped to hear whether the changes have been for better or for worse, but my questions not understood the way I had wanted. Perhaps there have not been major changes, or alternatively, those that have taken place may not have been observed as there are no evaluations and complaints are rare. The librarians are the ones to hear if users are satisfied, but it seems librarians do not participate in the planning of the library work. They take pride in performing well, but the ten mobile librarians work quite individually and do not have meetings to discuss their work. Over all, time is not as big an issue in Asia as in Europe and perhaps plans for future work are made in a different manner than I am used to.

Additional Observations

From what I could observe, there were some things the librarians of the Thai mobile units had in common with their Swedish colleagues. Work was performed with a rather pragmatic attitude, and the flexibility and warmth from the librarians was striking. Almost all rules seemed to be negotiable, depending on the arguments. Still, this did not give an impression of carelessness; rather, the users and I saw how the librarians considered each instance and made an appropriate decision. The number of books could be extended to someone proven responsible; reference books could be checked out (as “there is no Xerox in the bus”). Fines are rarely expedited as it is not always the user’s fault (may be due to the bus not arriving) and even if it is, the librarians prefer to
encourage the user to bring the book back. Occasionally, the librarian can charge a fine to set an example, but this varies from cases to case. Even though they do not fine books that are over-due, one librarian jokingly tells me her members want to fine her when the service has been cancelled. One bus stops along the way to pick up a member who has difficulties walking and will drop her off on the way back. One difficulty in the process of acquiring membership is sidestepped by the librarians’ accepting any photo, from childhood or a vacation. The librarians do work to encourage reading and do not worry about minor difficulties.

There is a very understanding attitude from both users and staff as they try to comply with each other’s needs. For the staff, there is no place to withdraw for meals or going to the bathroom. They have to leave the bus and go to places in the area. Users seem understanding and willing to wait for the librarian to return. They are also patient if the bus is crowded, when there are children reading on the floor or when another user is asking for help from the librarians. Although some users complain that the service is cancelled too often, they are very understanding vis-à-vis the situation of the staff and emphasize that the problems are related to BMA, who do not dole out the necessary funding.

In the future, I would be most interested to hear if a study can be performed on the effects of different forms of service. They probably appeal to different people, perhaps to an extent that justifies running them in tandem and letting the user choose between a stationary public library and a mobile unit. In areas where there is a library to go to, the bookmobile could be used for promotion of reading and make the library more available to people who otherwise would not go there. It could also carry exhibitions or books on certain topics to introduce some of what the library has to offer. Unfortunately, at the moment, very few people in the world can choose between stationary or mobile library services, as mobile service is only provided where there is no other service.

Conclusion
The BMA bookmobiles reach out further than the libraries do, and may be said to have a great impact. Using bookmobiles has not been a matter of choice but the only way for people in the outer communities to get in touch with the

256 In Sweden, the fine is sometimes ignored arguing that if the library only provides service every five weeks it is not reasonable to charge a fine if a user missed the bus once.
library system. So far, it seems middleclass people are common among the more enthusiastic users, perhaps because they already have an interest in reading and a demand for new reading material. This is not to say that the BMA bookmobiles would not have an even greater impact in the future with some adjustments. The BMA librarians have already shown how well they manage to find new ways of providing library service and how much they can achieve with little means. With more support, through cooperation and political decisions, the bookmobiles can be the instrument that does what the government aims at: instilling the habit of reading among the people in modern Thailand. After all, as one librarian put it: “the main point of [the] mobile library [is] to convince people to use it”.257

Recommendations:

Immediately see to the working conditions of the staff, and see if a brief training program for drivers can make them assistants.

Information about the service that already exists.

More reading promotion activities – show the books, talk about them, read stories to children whenever possible.

Weed out the collections, investigate future possibilities of commonly shared storage and catalogues.

Provide service at more points in the same neighborhood by shorter stops.

Make a plan for development (continuous evaluations of staff and user opinions and more communication between the librarians and their supervisor).

Make sure the bookmobile is reliable as regards quality and that service is prompt and regular.

Plan for long-term efforts to obtain more support from the DNFE and government. Work for legislation and more resources from officials. This includes better cooperation between the DNFE and the BMA librarians.

257 Interview 4.
One can argue for the existence of good library services using the UN Declaration of Human Rights, highlighting the individual and everyone’s right to information. Or, one can focus on the nation and argue that governments should provide libraries as it lies in their interest to educate the people. In any case, the work must be of quality, have clearly defined aims and evaluations to measure the extent of the results. My hopes are that the BMA will put more efforts into finding strategies to be able to measure, and show, the importance of providing mobile library services to people who do not have access to a library any other way.
Summary

The overall aim of this master’s thesis has been to examine how well mobile library units in Thailand succeed in reaching other people than those who visit the ordinary, stationary libraries. The following three questions were posed for this study of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Bookmobiles: What are the objectives of the mobile bus library project? To what extent does it achieve its objectives? What are the opinions of users, staff and administrators?

Eighteen interviews were performed with the help of a translator. The objectives were said to be “to reach everyone in Bangkok”, special priority to be given to children and slum communities. Currently, the ten bookmobiles provide service to about 60 points each week and administrators and staff consider that successful. Although a diversity of informants was requested, the users I met were middle-class and voracious readers. Users and staff were pleased with the library service the way it is now. Some users expressed a wish to have “more of the same”, but there are no expressed plans for change of services or extension of the number of service points unless more buses are acquired. If the users could choose between the bookmobile service of today and a small public library building at twice the distance, they would, however, prefer the library that was open longer and more frequently and had more space. Users enjoyed books (fiction and non-fiction), but did not bother about other information. Both staff and users seemed quite pragmatic and one reason why the mobile library functions so well today could be the understanding attitude and flexibility that prevails. For some people, the bookmobile is their only access to reading material; for others, it saves time and money as they no longer have to buy it. If the bookmobile service would be withdrawn they would go back to their previous behavior – i.e. buy their books or not read more than the newspaper.

Finally, recommendations are given: amongst others, I suggest that the BMA develop a development plan, which would improve the library’s work, as well as point out the good results already achieved in order to elicit better support from government officials.
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Appendix 1, List of Informants

2003-02-01  Interview 1: woman, 40 ys, housewife
2003-02-01  Interview 2: girl, 11 ys
2003-02-01  Interview 3: man, 40 ys, driver
2003-02-01  Interview 4: librarian
2003-02-02  Interview 5: supervisor of the librarians for bookmobiles
2003-02-05  Interview 6: librarian
2003-02-06  Interview 7: woman, 35 ys, housewife
2003-02-06  Interview 8: woman, 35 ys, halftime clerk
2003-02-06  Interview 9: woman, 66 ys, retired social worker
2003-02-07  Interview 10: man, 48 ys, shopkeeper
2003-02-07  Interview 11: two boys, both 13 ys
2003-02-08  Interview 12: woman, 82 ys, retired teacher
2003-02-08  Interview 13: woman, 30 ys, housewife
2003-02-08  Interview 14: three boys, 10, 10 and 12 ys
2003-02-08  Interview 15: librarian
2003-02-15  Interview 16: librarian
2003-02-15  Interview 17: woman, 48 ys, teacher
2003-02-15  Interview 18: girl, 14 ys