

## Editorial

Reading has been a subject of extensive debate in recent years. The debate has focused on the reading crisis among children and young people and reading is often charged with qualities such as literacy, empathy, education, democratic participation, among others. During these debates, public and academic libraries continue to play a crucial role in advancing both the study and practice of reading. Different notions of reading as expressed in debates, underline the multifaceted nature of reading and raise the critical question: what do we really mean when we talk about reading? Furthermore, what are the historical and institutional politics of reading in different settings? How are discourses of reading constituted, and is it possible to identify certain ideologies of reading?

This thematic issue of *Nordic Journal of Library and Information Studies* pays attention to the multifaceted and varying dimensions of reading, especially in relation to concepts such as reading practices and cultures, reading experiences and reading activities, e.g., reading promotion in different library contexts. The articles study reading from different methodological and theoretical perspectives, displaying the complexity of contemporary Scandinavian research on reading in Library and Information Science (LIS). In Norway, Sweden and Denmark, one of the most prominent discussions in recent years has centred on a presumed dramatic decline in children's literacy levels, with PISA studies frequently cited as evidence. This has led to a broader interest in research on readers and reading: some of the questions that have been asked are: Who counts as a reader? What does it mean to identify as one? How do different modalities influence the way we understand and approach reading? And how do we understand the relationship between leisure reading - driven by enjoyment and curiosity - and reading as a skill, often framed in terms of utility and performance?

### **Reading research in Library and Information Science in Scandinavia**

While LIS researchers within the Nordic countries grapple with many of the same questions around reading - such as declining literacy, changing reading habits, and the impact of digital technologies - their research traditions show subtle but important differences. Swedish reading research tends to carry a stronger critical orientation, particularly in comparison to Norway. This is reflected in the engagement with Foucauldian discourse analysis, and policy studies, often interrogating the societal norms and institutional frameworks that shape reading practices. A research field called critical studies of reading has emerged, where norms surrounding reading and actual reading practices are analyzed in relation to their historical and institutional contexts (see Lundh, Hedemark & Lindsköld, 2022). Norwegian research, by contrast, has on the one hand leaned more toward empirical studies applying phenomenological and pragmatic perspectives, for example in-depth studies in the tradition of Mukařovský (Smith, 2002) and Rosenblatt (Skjerdingsstad & Tangerås, 2025; Oterholm, 2016), and

on the other, more sociological perspectives. What these perspectives share is an interest in the readers' aesthetic and literary experiences. This also points towards a shared Scandinavian interest in shared reading. As in Norway, Danish LIS-based reading research has primarily examined reading as an experiential and phenomenological phenomenon, often combining phenomenological approaches with socially oriented understandings of reading practices (Balling, 2016). Complementary strands of research have addressed literature promotion in public libraries, as well as the cultural policy frameworks shaping reading and reading promotion (Grøn, 2010; Kann-Rasmussen & Balling, 2015).

#### *A user centered perspective on reading*

The focus on empirical readers - actual readers - is essential in reading research within LIS. User studies have traditionally examined how and why people read, but there is an increasing emphasis on the significance of the reading experience itself. This shift has methodological implications, as it challenges the assumption that survey data and statistics can adequately capture the nuanced dimensions of readers' experiences. The focus on user studies encompasses not only everyday readers but also librarians as professional readers - examining their literary values and tastes, attitudes toward popular fiction, and, additionally, the motivations of students aspiring to become librarians (e.g., Smidt, 2002; Kann-Christensen & Balling, 2014; Oterholm, 2016; 2019).

Children and young people constitute a key user group in empirical reading research (e.g., Tveit, 2012; Balling, 2017; Hedemark, 2020, Tveit & Olsen, 2025). This body of research frequently emphasizes and examines the contexts in which children and young people engage with texts, with particular attention to situations where reading occurs through interaction and mediation within various library settings. Beyond user-focused studies, an important strand of LIS research on reading concerns its social dimensions more broadly. A particularly influential development in this regard emerged in 2006 with the publication of *Reading Matters* by Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Lynne McKechnie, and Paulette M. Rothbauer. This work marked a significant shift in conceptualizing reading, foregrounding its inherently social character. Their work helped reframe reading as something people do together, in conversation, and in relation to different contexts and communities - an insight that continues to shape contemporary Scandinavian reading research in LIS.

#### *Reading and reading promotion research*

Reading research in LIS is closely intertwined with reading promotion and research on reading promotion. In recent years, reading promotion across different types of libraries (not only the public libraries) have been increasingly visible in LIS (e.g., Grøn, 2010). This development likely reflects society's increased attention on reading and a growing political attention to reading as an issue. For instance, Andrén (2024) discusses reading promotion in academic libraries, while other studies examine the role of school libraries in supporting teaching and learning in fx reading (Centerwall, 2022). However, as institutions operating within frameworks distinct from those of schools, libraries have historically adopted a different approach to reading. Over the past decades, the concept of pleasure reading has served as a key metaphor, shaping and signalling the library's position on reading.

Because reading in libraries cannot be detached from librarians' role as mediators of literature, this dimension remains an essential part of reading research within LIS. Consequently, discussions of readers' taste - and librarians' own taste - as well as their cultural mandate (*Bildung*) have long been, and continue to be, central to the field. This strand of research also encompasses the implementation of new technologies, methods, and promotional strategies aimed at fostering reading. A recurring question - perhaps the most persistent one - is how librarians can successfully engage young and diverse user groups. Recent examples include initiatives such as BookTok, Leser-Sørvis, and Shared Reading, which illustrate the interplay between traditional mediation practices and emerging digital cultures (for example Solseth et al., 2025; Forslid et al., 2022; Skøtt, 2018).

Although reading research in LIS is a multifaceted domain, new tendencies can be identified. A notable trend in contemporary reading culture is the rapid rise of audiobooks over the past decade, with Scandinavian markets clearly at the forefront. This is evident both in the time individuals spend listening to audiobooks and in their growing economic significance for publishers. The widespread popularity of audiobooks has also sparked increased scholarly interest in the phenomenon (Tanderup Linkis, 2021; Tattersall Wallin, 2022). Furthermore, reading has increasingly become a practice shaped by digital platforms such as BookTok, where print and digital modes converge and where social media and shareability profoundly influence reading cultures (Martens, Balling & Higgason, 2022; Kärrholm, 2025; Solseth et al., 2025).

At the same time, a growing concern about a "reading crisis" is being voiced across the Nordic countries. Politicians are calling for national reading strategies and demanding action. This crisis is often framed in relation to technological change - particularly the pervasive use of smartphones - and a perceived decline in attention spans (see fx Balling & Vestergaard, 2022; Hedemark & Lindsköld, 2025). These concerns are closely tied to debates about deep reading, and the cognitive value and haptic conditions of immersive reading experiences. The developments point to a broader shift in reading research, where reading is increasingly explored in interdisciplinary settings beyond LIS, including cognitive studies (e.g., Mangen, 2008), literary studies (Berglund, 2024; Persson, 2025; Steiner, 2025), and pedagogical and didactic research (Hauer, 2020; Lund, 2023). This expansion reflects the complexity of contemporary reading cultures and underscores the importance of continued dialogue across disciplinary boundaries, with LIS remaining a central contributor to the study of reading as a social, cultural, and mediated practice.

### **The articles**

The articles in this issue reflect and expand upon several of the emerging tendencies in contemporary reading research. They illustrate how reading research is increasingly concerned not only with what people read, but also with where, how, and under what cultural, technological, and institutional conditions reading takes place.

In the article "Reading Promotion in Swedish Academic Libraries", Rydbeck, Hedemark and Carmargo-Rojas (2026) investigate to what degree academic libraries engage in reading promotion activities. In the study, the authors ask not only how promotion is handled and organized in practice and what motivates it, but also why some libraries have specific reading promotion activities and others do not.

What are their arguments? The article relates to broader (also international) themes in the research on reading and readers: reading in and academic libraries, decreased reading skills in society, and the impact on reading more fiction (varied, not only the curricula) in educational settings.

In the article "Läsning på recept: Kunskapspraktiker i läsfrämjande insatser för barn och föräldrar under 2000-talets första decennium", Anna Lundh (2026) analyses reading promotion initiatives from the 2000s when collaborations between public libraries and child healthcare became increasingly common. Using a *What's the Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR) analytical framework, the study examines leaflets, books, DVDs, and other materials distributed to parents of young children as part of these initiatives. The analysis reveals a convergence of different knowledge practices – healthcare-related knowledge practices, influenced by logopaedics and children's library knowledge practices. The former is discursively dominant and remains influential in reading promotion today raising critical questions about the professional expertise of children's librarians.

Julia Pennlert (2026) focuses in the article "Den dubbla läsaren - Inläsaren som läsare och litteraturförmedlare" on audio books and the role of the audio book narrator - an actor that in recent years has gained increasing importance for the literary experience. By analysing empirical material generated by interviews of six active performing narrators in Sweden the study explores how the role of the performing narrator can be understood and interpreted as both a reader and a literary mediator. The article focuses on analysing issues related to how narrators themselves understand and conceptualize their role in relation to the assignment and to how they describe and articulate their personal relationship to the literary text. Finally, the article also investigates which tools, techniques, or strategies narrators identify as useful for conveying the text to its intended audience.

Elisa Tattersall Wallin, Birgitta Wallin and David Gunnarsson Lorentzen (2026) explore in "A great reader takes pleasure in little else – Exploring leisure activities of readers and non-readers in Sweden" patterns of cultural consumption by examining individuals' participation in a range of leisure activities and analysing the extent to which these practices intersect with book reading. Drawing on data from a Swedish national survey conducted by the SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg, which maps media use and related habits, the analysis focuses on respondents' reported leisure activities and employs cross-tabulations to explore correlations between these activities and self-reported reading practices. By situating book reading within broader leisure repertoires, the study seeks to illuminate how reading functions as a social and cultural practice.

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Guest editors

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