

# Print on Demand in Sweden: Four Projects and their Products, Problems and Prospects

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Print on demand in Sweden is nothing brand new. The technique has been used by publishers and printers for several years, but until two years ago almost never for the open book market. This use of print on demand is still only in the beginning of its development.

When starting my investigation of Swedish printing on demand last year in March,<sup>1</sup> I could find one (1) Swedish project marketing and selling print on demand produced books on the Internet. Today there are four similar projects and one more is taking shape as I speak. Even though these four projects in motion have not got more than a year to produce and make progress, I think it is possible to discover some trends. In this paper I intend to present some background material about Swedish print on demand, some facts about the four projects and their production and finally some of my thoughts about the future of print on demand in Sweden.

## 1. The history of Swedish print on demand: Curman, Myrdal and Forssell

The development of Swedish print on demand was accelerated in January 1997 when a odd constellation of three Swedish writers were invited to a press-conference. The three writers were Peter Curman, poet and former chair of the Swedish Writers' Association, Jan Myrdal, 70 years old political writer on the left wing with a reputation of being a harsh debater, and Lars Forssell, also 70 years old, poet and member of the Swedish Academy. In co-operation with the printing company Arkitektkopia they were invited to a press conference in Stockholm on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1997. There they presented how a digitally saved book manuscript can be printed in just as large edition as wished and that the Internet would be a rational medium to use for ordering titles published with the print on demand technique. Lars Forssell offered a collection of original poems and Jan Myrdal two collections of essays, one in Swedish and one in English. Peter Curman published titles of three kinds: one title with original poems that had been turned down by the editor, some titles out of print, and one title with translations of some of his poems to Turkish.

The presentation at the press conference attracted much attention and a debate started in the press afterwards about the possibilities and consequences with the print on demand technique. Many understood the three writers' move as a revolt against the publishers, but they made it very clear in their press release that this was not the case. They wanted the publishers to realise the advantages of print on demand even in the production for the book market. "We do not regard publishers as our enemies, we extend our hand to them. [...] Our aim is to just point publishers what can be achieved."<sup>2</sup> The writers' main point was that with print on demand there would no longer be any need to hold large stocks. It would be possible to keep the complete

Swedish literary history as a backlist and anyone in the world with Internet access would be able to order any title they wanted.

## 2. The projects: Books-on-demand, Podium, Drama Direkt, Instant Book

### *Books-on-demand (Mart Marend and Nykopia)*

One of the important issues at the press conference was that Internet could be used as channel for marketing and selling print on demand products. The web site used for this purpose was maintained by a one-man company called Calidris, owned by Mart Marend and situated on Gotland, far away from the centre of events. The service was called Books on Demand, but soon the distribution of the three writers' titles was handed over to a magazine, Folket i Bild, which had its own web site <<http://www.fib.se/pod/index.html>>. Instead Mart Marend started a co-operation with another printing house in Stockholm called Nykopia Tryck AB and in the fall 1997 he presented four new titles. Mart Marend has experience from traditional publishing during a couple of years in the 1980's. When desktop publishing became a reality he started his own business in information management including pre press services and web solutions.

Last autumn, together with Nykopia Tryck AB, Marend applied for project money from NUTEK, Swedish National Board for Industrial and Technical Development. The application was accepted and today Books on Demand is run as a subsidiary company to Nykopia Tryck AB under the official name BOD International AB, with Mart Marend as their employee.

Books on Demand offers a production service which includes digital typesetting, graphic design and layout, contacts with the printing house, marketing and mediating orders on Internet and, maybe most important, storing the text digitally. Books on Demand differs from a traditional publishing company in several ways. Firstly there is not made any selection of texts. Any writer who has the money to pay the service is welcome to publish his or her text at "Books-on-demand". Secondly the company does not stand any economical risk – the writer take all the risk himself. And thirdly Books on Demand does not take any responsibility for the content in the products produced and distributed by the company. The writer is legally responsible for the publication.

Books on demand has published 23 titles, 18 monographs by 15 different writers and 5 anthologies (beginning of March 1999). Seven of the sixteen writers are not formerly published. Four of the titles have connection to Gotland, and another four titles are life stories, the writer's or a relative's or a friend's. This is symptomatic for the use of print on demand. So far the books produced are directed to a local or otherwise restricted audience.

### *Podium (time limited project located to Författarcentrum Öst)*

After the press conference in 1997 Peter Curman managed to gather a group of people to start another print on demand project with the working title Svenska Nätbokklubben (Swedish Net Book Club). The participants in this project come from The Swedish Booksellers Association, The Royal Library, Stockholm City Library, a writers association called Författarcentrum Öst (Writers' Center East), a state financed publishing house called En bok för alla (A Book For Everyone), the printing company Arkitektkopia Colorcenter, and two partly state financed companies working with digital typesetting, Författares Bokmaskin and Tidskriftsverkstaden i Stockholm. Together this group wrote an application for project financing from one of the funds coming out of the closed wage earners' investment funds, Framtidens Kultur (Culture of the Future). They got the money and the project, that finally was named Podium, could start in January 1998. The project was located to Författarcentrum Öst, where one project leader was

employed and one halftime web master. Representatives for the participating institutions take part of and influence the work through a working party, which meets regularly approximately once a month.<sup>3</sup>

At Podium books are right now published in two different lines. First there is a line of selected titles, classics or out of print. Then there is an open publication line, similar to the idea of Books on Demand, where primarily original texts could be published. One explicit ambition at Podium is to actively support publishing titles in immigrant and minority languages. For this purpose a special immigrant literature editor has been employed, and there are titles waiting to be published within this area. This could develop to a publishing line of its own.

The selected titles are chosen from proposals considered in the working party. The proposals often come from members in the working party with special knowledge about book titles, which are demanded by book lenders and book buyers, but not currently in print and not up for a new printing. This is meant to become some kind of combination of a backlist and a list of classic titles. This makes Podium different from Books on demand since there actually is an important selecting part in process of choosing titles. So far the open line is also more restricted than at Books on Demand. Podium's open line is only open for members of either The Swedish Writers' Association or Författarcentrum Öst.

The Podium project differs from Books on Demand also in another important way. The titles published by Podium are on display on Internet but is only available to buy through traditional bookshops. This connection with the traditional bookshops is very important in the Podium concept. As in the original project with Curman, Forssell and Myrdal, it has never been an ambition to get into conflict neither with the booksellers nor with the publishers. Podium wishes to try the possibilities with the print on demand technique, and see how these can benefit the book market. Hence the titles published should be able to buy from your ordinary bookseller. In a far distant future maybe the bookseller himself will have a copier in the basement, but today his part in the distribution-chain is to effectuate the customers order.

From the beginning Podium's printing partner was Arkitektkopia, the one involved in the press conference 1997, but since then they have tried other partners, it is after all an experimental project. These other partners are Novum grafiska, a printing house originally based in Gothenburg, but which is now growing and has established an office in Stockholm since a few years, and Parajett, a printing house originally based in Landskrona in the south of Sweden but also establishing printing in the Stockholm area from the beginning of 1999.

Podium called for a press conference in May 1998, when the first six titles of the project's publishing were presented. These titles were supposed to give a picture of what kinds of literature that would be suitable for printing on demand. Two of them were children's stories of well known Swedish writers. These titles were out of print and the publishers have no intention to make any reprints. The third title was a collection of translations to Turkish of Swedish women writers' love poems. This title had not been published before. The three remaining titles were reprints of titles out of print long ago: one short novel by a young Finland-Swedish modernist, first published posthumously 1932, one collection of poems causing a lot of debate when it was first published 1946, and one essay or travel book first published in 1973. All three titles asked for by small groups of readers with special literary interests.

Maybe one could have expected that Podium should have published some more titles. Since May 1998 only five new titles have been published, and two of them were writers' own productions. The explanation to that is that much time has been used for information to the

writers about print on demand in general and Podium especially. There have also been seminars and courses in desk top publishing. To be able to print on demand the writers must know how to use computer software for word processing and type setting and how to store the texts digitally. This has not been evident.

One interesting aspect of Podiums publishing is a newly started test co-operation with HSFR (The Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences). In March 1999 Podium published two scientific reports from HSFR, which is a signal for the interest that scientific and other public authorities show for print on demand. These kinds of institutions could probably gain a lot from using print on demand instead of traditional printing for some parts of their publishing activity.

#### *Drama Direkt (Swedish Playwrights' Association)*

Both Books on Demand and Podium are financed by public authorities or funds specialised on cultural matters. The third project I intend to present – Drama Direkt, initiated in 1997 by The Swedish Playwrights' Association – also got its first financing from the above mentioned Framtidens Kultur. When this first pot was used, Drama Direkt got life-sustaining economical support during a short period in 1998 from the National Board for Cultural Affairs. Before that the project Drama Direkt had been noticed in a governmental proposition on the conditions for artists.<sup>4</sup> This resulted in a post in the state budget for 1999, where Drama Direkt was guaranteed a specified sum, which must be seen as a highly privileged situation.

The idea, developed from a Canadian concept,<sup>5</sup> is to give playwrights a chance to reach primarily theatres and theatrical companies, but also the audience, with printed copies of their plays. Today only a few of the most well known Swedish playwrights have their plays published by traditional publishing houses. With this initiative anyone who is a member of the Swedish Playwrights' Association can send in his or her manuscripts as a digitally saved computer file, which will be adapted for printing on demand or reading on the screen. The presentation of the texts is made in two ways. The ordinary audience who makes a search in the archives is able to order any play by print on demand for the common price of 125 SEK. Theatres and companies are allowed a password, with which they have access to the text in fulltext, to read on their screen or to print from their own computer.

Drama Direkt tried a couple of the earlier mentioned printing houses, but now uses Nykopia Tryck AB. The management of the web site is bought from an Internet company called Knutpunkten.<sup>6</sup> The project has been very successful so far and offers the largest backlist of the four print on demand projects presented here. In March this year (990315) Drama Direkt had 87 plays in the archives, but this is growing rapidly: there are many interested playwrights who send in their plays.

The ambition is to create an archive with all plays, which have ever been performed on stage in Sweden, plays originally written in Swedish as well as translations to Swedish. As a first step the writers and translators of the plays performed during the season 1995/96 was contacted and then all members of The Swedish Playwrights' Association. As in the case with Podium, one soon discovered that there was a great need of education in word processing, and the two projects have been working together on this.

#### *Instant Book (Clas Kjellin Media et co.)*

The last project of the four in my presentation is called Instant Book and was initiated by the minor publishing company CKM (Clas Kjellin Media). The owner of CKM, Clas Kjellin, has together with a lawyer, a literary historian and the printing company Tierps Tryckeri AB for-

med a network and a company, Instant Book AB, which deals with printing on demand only. This is the only completely privately financed print on demand project active right now. Instant Book does not use the Internet for marketing or selling, and this makes Instant Book even less a publisher than Books-on-demand, since the writer has to deal with marketing and selling the books all by himself.

Since Clas Kjellin also runs a traditional publishing company, he has the advantage of being able to advise some of his customers with suitable manuscripts to publish their work with the print on demand technique. The connection to CKM also means that Instant Book has access to all the pre press and graphic design competence needed. In December 1998 Instant Book had published 18 titles by 15 writers and 6 more titles produced by different companies. Six of the writers were publishing their first book ever.

### 3. The products

Books on Demand and Nykopia Tryck AB have from the start of their common project produced a quite simple book. The cover is a combination of white, linen structured, soft cardboard on the back and a transparent plastic film on the front. There is no printing on the cover. Instead Books on demand uses the first page of the insert as “cover page“. The colour for this first page is often other than white, typically sand beige. This means the insert can be printed and the cover put on in one single printing action. There is no second phase when a hard cover should be put on. Of course the customer can order a special cover but must in that case print the cover in 500 copies. Nykopia is the only printing company that offers the possibility to print one (1) copy at the time. For example Tierps Tryckeri prints a minimum of 10 copies and Parajett a minimum of 20 copies.

Podium have put in more energy in the graphic design of their products than Books on Demand. At the press conference in May 1998, the two titles of children’s literature had coloured covers. The other covers were in black and white but with unique layout for each title. Two different persons have made the design of the covers of these six titles, one person had the responsibility for the design of the inserts, two persons made the graphics for the web while a third is mastering the web site. Since the network is wide and Podium doesn’t have any commercial interest, more money has been spent on each title than they would bring in at the price they are sold for. On the other hand a lot of initial design work is done, which could be in use for some time.

The books coming from Drama Direkt have very varying layout depending on the file coming from the playwright. In this project no one is engaged especially for the design matters. The IT-company managing the web site mostly work with making the word processing files available on the Internet.

Instant Book on the other can offer any cover the customer wants and can afford thanks to the close relation to the publisher CKM. Many of the print on demand books from Instant Book are actually some kind of hybrids of traditional and on demand printing.

An important question about print on demand is of course how much it costs to publish a title with this technique. Three of the four projects whose work I have been following, are available for any writer for production of books on demand. The ordering routines are not very similar, so I have made a dummy example and from the different projects’ own figures, all presented on a web page at Podium’s web site,<sup>7</sup> I have calculated what it would cost to produce my dummy at each project. My example is a manuscript ready for printing, 120 pages and I want it in 100 copies.

At Podium this would cost about 6430 SEK (depending on which printing house they use). At Books on Demand (using Nykopia) the price would be almost the same: 6425 SEK, while Instant Books (Tierps Tryckeri) is a little more expensive: 6600 SEK for a book with 100 pages and approximately 7400 SEK for 120 pages (my own calculation).

If you make your order directly at the printing house, you can get lower prices. Arkitektkopia will print the insert for 4360, and the cover at a minimum of 500 copies for another 1200, which give a total of 5560 SEK. Parajett has a lower price for the insert, but more expensive for the cover: 3202 plus 2351 which give a total of 5553 SEK.

Novum has only presented figures for printing a book with a four colour cover and for manuscripts with at least 160 pages which would cost 8800 SEK. I have made similar calculations for the other printing houses to be able to compare Novums cost level. Arkitektkopia would do the same product (160 pages, four colour cover) at the price of 9660 SEK and Parajett for 8235 SEK. Thus, at this level the differences somewhat increase.

Books on Demand offers the printing of a book with four colour cover at the same price as one with black and white, when ordering at least 100 copies. What the price would be is hard to tell, since Books on demand doesn't give any alternatives to the 120 pages example. A calculation from 120 pages times 30 % (which would sum up to almost 160 pages) gives, that the price would be somewhere just over 8000 SEK anyway.

Instant Books though, gives a price that is better than the other three printing houses. According to their own figures you should add 5 SEK per copy to the original price to get the four colour cover price. That would be about 7900 SEK.

All these prices are pure productions costs without VAT. To the final price for the book on market comes more. The print on demand process, with all the machines and personal necessary, makes the book printed on demand more expensive than a mass produced paperback. A print on demand book with 100 pages will cost you about 120 SEK wherever you turn. An ordinary novel with 300 pages would somewhere about 350 SEK, no cheaper than a book produced by offset. At Books on Demand you will have to pay 20 SEK for ordering single copies to have sent home by mail. If you want to buy a book from Podium, you must add about 42 % to the printing price per copy because of the co-operation between Podium and the bookshops; all titles from Podium are sold through bookshops only. As book-producer the connection with bookshops could be a way to increase the possibilities for your titles to reach the potential book buyers, if the marketing of Podium's production is well organised in the stores.

#### **4. Discussion: problems and prospects**

How will print on demand fit in to the Swedish book market? If print on demand ever has been seen as a threat against traditional book printing and publishing in Sweden it can after following four different projects definitely be ensured that it is no threat. Print on demand is a complement to the existing book market, not in competition with it. The type of titles published by print on demand are titles which otherwise would not have been published at all.

Of 30 private writers that have published titles at Books on Demand or Instant Books, 13 are publishing their first book ever.<sup>8</sup> The others have to a great extent earlier published their books themselves or they have been published by a traditional publishing house that no longer is interested in their manuscripts. So what we see here is a medium for writer's who have lost their position or earlier have not had any position at all in the literary field, if I may use a notion from Pierre Bourdieu. Print on demand is a medium for the marginalised. It is also the inten-

tion in the Podium project to use print on demand for republishing of titles that is not economically defensible for a traditional publisher to keep in stock, and literature written by authors whose first language isn't Swedish.

But doesn't this mean that those who buy print on demand titles buy them instead of other traditionally printed and published titles? No, I really don't think so. These titles are often so specialised, that I think that the consumers of the books are people who are not buying this book instead of another but this book as well. The time the consumer take to read this book, I would think is not taken from time that would be spent on reading other books, but from other leisure time.

All the projects I have been investigating have met problems of different kinds. The need for educating writers in what could be seen as simple matters of word processing should not be neglected. I think that we who encounter electronic publishing in our daily work often overestimate the general knowledge about all things concerning web publishing and print on demand. This also means that the print on demand projects have a lot of work to do marketing their production. It is all very well that they use the Internet for presentation of their publishing and services. But how should the ordinary book shop customers find their way to the specific web sites where this information is given? Podium has a close co-operation with some thirty book shops, but there is still a long way to common knowledge about you can buy books published by the print on demand technique in your ordinary book shop. I personally think Drama Direkt has been right in wanting to build up a considerable list of titles before making any marketing to speak about. You must have something to choose from as a customer if you are not to lose interest for the phenomenon print on demand as such.

Another problem is the publishing of classics. A lot of old titles have been published in many different editions during the years. Some of these editions have been deliberately shortened, others are corrupted by different reasons, and some still are subject for textual criticism as one of the six first titles chosen by Podium. The Finland-Swedish modernist Henry Parland's short novel *Sönder* was never published while he was alive. A couple of editions with different dispositions have been published since 1932. Just a few months before Podium presented their version a dissertation on the novel was published at Uppsala university, but Podium was lacking academic competence in the working party and chose an edition published some ten years earlier, which had been much criticised. If the print on demand projects are going to publish classics, they can not just pick the edition on the nearest book shelf, but must take responsibility for what they publish. The digitally stored backlist of classic literature of a print on demand company could be a perfect shopping list for school teachers, and they ought to know that they get texts they can rely on.

What is also very interesting is of course the development within the academia. The example from Podium with the publication of two scientific reports from HSFR shows that print on demand is a technique that is taken under serious consideration. Until a year ago, we had in Sweden a system, which granted all Ph.D.-students an economical support for printing their dissertation. This has been taken away. Now no one really knows what will happen since the financial situation at the universities are as bad as everywhere else in official Sweden. The money corresponding to the calculated cost for printing dissertations will still be given to the universities, but they are not any longer obligated to use them for this specific purpose. And the question now is, whether the money will be used for printing dissertations just as before or if there are such big needs in other parts of the organisation, that the financing the printing of dissertations can come into question. And maybe printing on demand would be a solution here. My guess is that the first Swedish dissertation that is published as a print on demand title will

come from some of the technical or medical sectors. Within these areas the number of dissertations are higher and the relatively shorter texts are more suitable for printing on demand than the social and humanist sciences longer monographs.

Finally, what does the future for print on demand look like? Well, nothing is more difficult than to say something about the Internet and data business of tomorrow, and I should probably pass on this one. But still, let me try by summarising some of the tendencies I have been able to see.

The four projects I have been following are just in the beginning of their development. But it is recognisable that those using print on demand for publishing are those who have difficulties having their texts spread by traditional publishing or who simply don't need traditional publishing for their purposes. But traditional publishing will still mean a lot in the literary field since the print on demand projects generally are open to anyone and don't claim to have any selecting competence.

As long as the book published by print on demand is no cheaper than an offset printed book, it is no alternative for the ordinary book buyer. The technique must be much cheaper and the titles to choose from many more before print on demand will have its breakthrough with the consumers.

What can be done by print on demand though, is keeping a lot more titles in stock, single titles that are asked for again and again during long periods, but not in any large numbers every time, different titles of experimental fiction or poetry, that will always have their readers, but not in any large numbers. But the question is if the traditional publishers like that kind of book market.

## References

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2. Quotations from the invitation to press conference, published as "Books on demand! Swedish writers publish their own books on the Internet" at <http://www.fib.se/pod/index.html>.
3. The Swedish National Board of Cultural Affairs was also represented to begin with, but after granting the project some financial support, this representative left the working party.
4. *Konstnärernas villkor*, regeringens proposition 1997/98:87, s. 43, URL: [http://kultur.regeringen.se/propositionermm/propositioner/pdf/p9798\\_87.pdf](http://kultur.regeringen.se/propositionermm/propositioner/pdf/p9798_87.pdf).
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6. There is no good translation to English for this word; *The Centre* or *The Junction* would be alternatives, but *The Node* would be more suitable considering the Internet connection. URL: <http://www.knutpunkten.se>.
7. <http://www.swepod.com/inf/8tryckkostnader.htm>.
8. Podium and Drama Direkt are not considered with here. Podium do have a free line, but does not yet have any production to talk about in this line, and Drama Direkt is meant for playwrights with membership in The Playwrights' Association.