

National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe
3rd Naple Conference in Helsinki 19.-20.10.2006

Appeal to the European commission 20.10.2006

The Role of Public Libraries in the European Knowledge Society

In 1998 the European Parliament adopted a report of Member of the European Parliament Mrs Mirja Ryyänen called The Role of Libraries in the Modern World (A4-0248/98). The report called on the European Commission and the Member States to support a number of measures in regard to consolidating the role played by libraries in ensuring access to information and knowledge. The Commissioner announced that the Commission would now begin work on a Communication stimulating concentration on all the important aspects affecting modern library services and citizen's access to them. The Communication would address a number of specific issues, including lifelong learning, copyright, literacy, regional information services and public library collaboration on access to knowledge. More emphasis was to be placed on activities involving libraries under the Fifth Framework Programme.

Resolutions referred to in the context were, among others

- the resolution of 30 March 1984 on the creation of a European Library,
- the Council resolution of 27 September 1985 on collaboration between libraries in the field of data processing,

- UNESCO's 1994 Public Library Manifesto,
- the resolution of 1994 on the recommendation to the European Council: 'Europe and the global information society' and the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament and to the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: 'Europe's way to the information society: an action plan',
- the resolution of 1995 on the G7 conference on the information society,
- the Commission White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment - the challenges and ways forward into the 21st century (COM(93)0700 - C3-0509/93),
- the Commission's communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a methodology for the implementation of information society applications (COM(95)0224),
- the Commission's Green Paper on Copyright and Related Rights in the Information Society (COM(95)0382 - C4-0354/95),
- the White Paper on Education and Training - Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society (COM(95)0590 - C4-0597/95),
- the interim report of January 1996 and the final report of April 1997 of the high-level group of experts on building the European information society for all,
- the Green Paper 'Living and Working in the Information Society: People First' (COM(96)0389 final), adopted on 24 July 1996,
- the Commission communication Learning in the information society - Action plan for a European education initiative (1996-1998) (COM(96)0471 - C40528/96),
- the Council resolution of 25 July 1996 on electronic publishing and libraries (96/C 242/02),
- the report of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media (A4-0248/98),

Currently many other resolutions could be added to the above mentioned, here to mention only

-the European Council's draft recommendations on Libraries and Democracy; the Responsibilities of the State, Local Authorities and Professionals and the follow-up conference in Strasbourg in November 1998 and the 68th CDCC

session in 2000 on Draft Guidelines on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe (CDCC(2000)8)

- the 20002 IFLA Internet Manifesto

- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on 2010: Digital Libraries (SEC(2005) 1194 -1195)

- Conclusions on the World Summit of the Information Society held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005

- the Dynamic Action Plan for the EU co-ordination of digitisation of cultural and scientific content, launched by the UK Presidency in 2005

- the Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning, 2005

- the 2006 white paper on a European communication strategy

- the EU co-funded successful library projects in which public library authorities participated, including Chilias, Publica, Pulman and Calimera

- the extensive European cooperation on the wider European library agenda on through the NAPLE Forum for national authorities on public libraries in Europe and other mechanisms to meet overarching agendas and encompassing appropriate strategies and policies at a national level.

There is a profound mutual understanding and consensus between European public library authorities on how to meet the challenges of the knowledge society. However, when activities involving libraries are initiated by the European Union, the role of public libraries as providers of information and knowledge and promoters of information and media literacy is constantly overshadowed by that of supporting the memory agenda of, libraries, together with archives and museums in order to digitise and access cultural heritage resources. The objectives of most

European public library policies aim at ensuring access to information and knowledge, actively promoting literacy and media skills, and promoting also an interest in literature and reading, with focus on children, young people.

Projects launched in the EU Programmes often seem incongruent with current strategies and policies of European public library authorities, aiming at

- provision of information, cultural and knowledge resources for learners and citizens taking an active part in social and civic life
- provision of literacy skills and media literacy
- provision of traditional reading skills and literacy, promoted also on library web sites
- current cooperation between public libraries, school libraries and scientific libraries to ensure the provision of information and knowledge for citizens and especially for learners inside or outside institutions

The hybrid library concept was launched in 1997, giving meaning to the public library offering services and collections in electronic formats as well as in the printed form and providing virtual meeting places as well as public physical spaces open to all. The ALM concept which the EU launched to promote cooperation between what are called the memory institutions viz. the archives, libraries and museums, runs the risk of ignoring the core functions of the public library service.

In the hybrid libraries new materials and services are introduced, new skills are required, new possibilities and extended services are on offer. The virtual and the traditional services and collections complement each other. Literacy skills are based on the capability of the user to access the appropriate sources for a variety of needs - from databases to the local newspaper in the library to those sources held in the museum. Excellent

reading skills are the prerequisite for literacy and empowerment in the civic domain.

Automation, new technology and the Internet have changed routines and user expectations in the post-modern library world. Today's European library users are accustomed to using the search machines of the web, but for more advanced information retrieval there is a compelling need for the competencies of the information professionals.

The network of European hybrid libraries strongly support and promote an active European community with equal opportunities for all, regardless of domicile, family background or economic circumstances.

The representatives of the national authorities on public libraries in Europe, meeting in Helsinki during the Finnish presidency for the 3rd Naples Conference, call on the European Commission

-to recognise the diverse roles which public library authorities play in the cultural and multicultural sphere as well as of the civic knowledge society, and the potential of the collective European public library network to promote social wellbeing, equal opportunities, harmony and integration

-to recognise the expert knowledge of national library authorities and other professionals as outlined in policies and strategies for developing public library services as well as the extended European cooperation and benchmarking in this field.

In order to establish sustainable support for the development of the public library sector as an important actor in developing a transparent, democratic citizens' Europe, the national authorities for public libraries suggest that a European Public Libraries group should be established by the European Council of Ministers.