

Repositioning European Public Libraries

ECEI10 “Delivering Digital Europe in Public Libraries”, 20 and 21 September 2010, Brussels
Workshop “**European policy for public libraries: What will it say, what can it do?**”

1 Introduction and Rationale

In recent decades, the world has been moving at a faster pace. The pressures due to globalisation, the digital shift coupled with an increasing cultural diversity are reshaping Europe. Our economy, culture, and social structures are changing, often drastically.

This continual evolution affects European developments on a global scale and each member state individually. The present financial crisis increases the sense of urgency with which all policy agendas respond to the changes.

To tackle these challenges which arise for all sectors including the public library network, the EU has developed “Europe 2020” with a view to engendering **smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth**.

NAPLE and EBLIDA, having regard to the foregoing, have jointly identified a series of social changes which impact on the position of public libraries in Europe. These changes are drivers for the **renewal of public library policies** in several member states of the EU.

NAPLE and EBLIDA endorse the renewal of public library policies on a European level by organising this debate on a European level. The outcome should lead **to integrating the further development of the public library sector into the current EU agendas**.

The first part of this document discusses the repositioning of public libraries in Europe. The second part discusses ideas on what could be done on a European level to further develop a coherent vision agreed with all stakeholders and supporting the stimulation of appropriate measures.

2 Context

It is the aim of NAPLE www.mcu.es/naple/ and EBLIDA www.eblida.org to work together on the renewal of public library policies and to propose a dynamic role at EU level towards public library services. This was reflected in the Vienna Declaration (see the EBLIDA and NAPLE websites) which is one of the outcomes of the Joint EBLIDA/NAPLE conference held in Vienna (May 2009).

During the following EBLIDA/NAPLE conference, held in Helsinki (May 2010), a position paper on "Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society" was developed having regard to discussions on the emerging questions and needs in our society as they relate to the role of (public) libraries.

The outcome of these deliberations form the basis for this document, which is published with a view to preparing for the EBLIDA/NAPLE workshop "**European policy for public libraries: What will it say, what can it do?**" on September 21st during the ECEI10 conference (see below).

Further inspiration for this document was found in the following documents:

1. *Libraries. Knowledge Commons, Meeting Place and Cultural Arena in a Digital Age.*
A report to the Norwegian Parliament
2. *The public libraries in the Knowledge Society*
Danish report
3. *Présentation des propositions de Frédéric Mitterrand pour le développement de la lecture*
France
4. *Finnish public library policy 2015*
National strategic areas of focus
5. *Council of Europe/EBIDA Guidelines on Library legislation and policy in Europe.*
Paul Sturges 2000
6. Several documents produced on the EU level, including :
 - a. "Europe 2020" http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm
 - b. "A Digital Agenda for Europe" http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/index_en.htm
 - c. "The European Agenda for Culture"
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/doc399_en.htm
 - d. Initiatives on Media literacy and e-inclusion
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/index_en.htm

7. A first draft of the EBLIDA/NAPLE Forum Position Paper on 'The role of libraries in an evolving Europe'

The ideas in this document will be discussed during ECEI10 "Delivering Digital Europe in Public Libraries", 20 and 21 September 2010, in Brussels. More specifically, they will form the focus in the Workshop "**European policy for public libraries: What will it say, what can it do?**" on September 21st.

3 Repositioning Public Libraries

EBLIDA and NAPLE Forum aim to start a dialogue on the renewal and strengthening of the role of public libraries as a basic service for all Europeans. Throughout the European Union, public libraries provide access to the digital and cultural world, and are the recognized public space for culture, knowledge and assembly and are embedded in people's lives. With the development of a consistent policy, public library services can be an essential instrument helping people to face cultural and social challenges. By doing so, library staff and their services will also strengthen the sense of community between citizens.

Points made in this document refer to issues that fall within the mandates of other organisations, for example, developing informal learning services within communities, the role of the 'third space', working on media literacy

Position 1. We need a renewed pan-European 'Unique Selling Point' for Public Libraries in the Knowledge Society.

We have the critical task of determining the exact place which we want public libraries to occupy within several policy areas, and formulating the 'unique selling point' that libraries alone can make.

3.1 Digital shift, e-culture....

Digital technology is a driving force in our society. Economic, cultural and social life takes place increasingly in a digital world. A growing number of people are participating in this digital environment, regardless of time and place. People are confronted with an overwhelming amount of content and services. They need guides, orientation and advice. As a consequence, content and services will become more and more personalized.

3.1.1 Access with a local flavour

Public libraries bring digital content to local communities, covering current topics in the community, delivered in a local style of language, culture and images. They can engage in an emotional interaction in topics and content through face to face contact with people.

Position 2. Public libraries are in the forefront of helping people in the digital environment
Public libraries are local portals to a world of knowledge and culture. They can connect users to content and services which are provided by other players. To strengthen this visible and meaningful role in the public domain in the digital environment, an integrated broader digital strategy is necessary.

Position 3. Public libraries have to develop new business models, and engage in public-private partnerships.

Public libraries will need to rethink their added value in delivering content in a context where boundaries between public and private content and between different public institutions blur. Which new business models are feasible? What is the core business of public libraries in this new landscape? And what about funding sources for such developments?

3.1.2 A reliable guide

Public libraries are recognized by the public at large as reliable institutions with an emphasis on quality service provision. They are public spaces where people yearn to discover new things, to ask for help, and to help each other. It is an open environment offered without pressure to perform or to consume.

Position 4. Public libraries have to be embedded in a broad e-strategy.

Public libraries should become as proficient in the digital content and service delivery service, as they are in the physical domain. But are they able to develop this capacity on their own? Or should they be proactively included in strategies developed on another level, for example, through strategies which envelop a wider digital knowledge infrastructure, through the deployment of e-government services to the public etc.?

3.1.3 Bridging the digital divide

Throughout Europe, public libraries are delivering internet access to people as a basic service. In addition, libraries provide educational programs, often with the help of specialist partners, on how

to use new digital tools, how to critically assess digital content, and how to use and share content in a responsible way.

Position 5. Public libraries have to prioritise media literacy support in their development plans.

Public libraries can be useful partners in developing media literacy. Their roles are many: be it facilitators providing infrastructure, networkers gathering several partners around them, or coaches helping people to learn. We need more examples and models of successful practice and new alliances to expand these and re-imagine possibilities.

3.2 Learning. Ideas. Creativity. Innovation.

The European Union focuses strongly on developing the innovation capacity of our society. Innovation is promoted as the single most important strategy to further the competitive position of the EU on a global scale. Culture in all its' dimensions is seen as a crucial factor contributing to this approach.

To foster continuing culture-based creativity requires particular conditions which include:

- *personal abilities, including the ability to think laterally or in a non-linear way, to be imaginative,*
- *technical skills, including artistic skills and craftsmanship,*
- *a socially sympathetic environment where education and learning values creativity together with economic investment in culture and culture-based creativity.*

(From "The impact of culture on creativity: A study prepared for the European Commission.")

3.2.1 Learning spaces

Public libraries are places where people learn in a relaxed informal setting .Whether browsing through collections, discovering new things, talking and listening, reading, gathering and assessing information, the choice is the users, at his pace, in his own time. Library staff and services contribute to the development of the individual and to social identity. They help people discover talents in themselves and others. People learn to appreciate diversity and value the unexpected. Libraries are places where people learn from each other. The users create a social environment where learning and educating is a positive and pleasant experience.

Position 6. Public libraries must consider learning and educational processes.

Librarians have a long tradition of facilitating the conditions which promote a physical learning environment but are often unaware of the social and psychological aspects of learning. How should they develop these competences?

Position 7. Public Libraries have to be embedded in the local learning strategy

Public libraries can only be fully exploited as learning spaces when other players in society see them and use them as such: schools, non-formal educational organizations, etc. Isn't it necessary to incorporate public libraries in a cross-domain educational/ learning policy?

3.2.2 Capacity building in our society

We live in a meritocracy. Those who are able to fully participate in society, can do so and will gain the benefits. But there is a percentage of the population that lack the requisite skills, suffering from a complex and interrelated set of negative factors that make it impossible for them to participate fully and to consider themselves equal to others.

Public libraries present themselves as institutions "for all people", and at the same time know they have to walk the extra mile to reach out to those who need a helping hand.

Position 8. Public libraries should review their identity to be really valuable for people in society who need them most.

Public libraries may be seen as middle class institutions, grounded in their tradition, forming the bulk of their customer base and served by well educated middle class staff. Welfare policies developing strategies should ensure that public libraries are places where all are welcome and catered for equally. Shouldn't librarians be aware that joining this mainstream service does not mean that people must agree to a given lifestyle consensus?

Position 9. Increasing the capacity to innovate the whole library sector is a pressing imperative

Public libraries suffer from the weight of tradition. To turn them into resourceful places for all the people, implies that library staff should themselves develop innovative ideas, be creative and experiment with new ways of working, partnering up with profit and non-profit agencies alike. Do we need a coherent strategy to trigger a change in the mindset of librarians and to furnish the library community with new skills to take on this broader role?

3.3 Fragmentation, cohesion, and the civil society

The pressures arising from globalisation and the development of a culturally diverse society, increased personalisation of services, the exponential growth of digitally enhanced social networks, the continuous pressure on people to be flexible, mobile, innovative bring challenges and can lead to fragmentation of our society. Many people feel alienated, isolated even. Those who cannot

cope are at a loss, with the risk of being enveloped in organizations and groups with broader agendas. Societal cohesion can be at risk, wellbeing is threatened and the ability to cope with change is challenged.

In the post-war period, the response to such problems consisted in the development of an extensive welfare state and professionalization of care in Europe. Nowadays, the answer to these problems seems to be found in strengthening the individual and having people participating in working out solutions. Through this participative process, new levels of cohesion are (or should be) established within society in three spaces. The first relates to the home, concerns over health and family; the second space of work, school, the formal participation of people in society; and the third space for leisure time, media, culture. This third space is also considered to be the most superfluous while it is vital for peoples' lives.

3.3.1 The Third place

Public libraries are third places, where people can be involved in activities that are manifestly different from what is happening in family life, during school or work time.

People can be immersed in other cultures and in other lives, via reading, listening, seeing or meeting others during library activities. It strengthens identity and at the same time develops engagement with other people.

Position 10. Public libraries should be hubs for community life

Traditionally, librarians are supply driven. They promote collections in libraries and other knowledge institutions. To expand their role as a third place for the local community, a more user-focused, sensitive strategy having regard to the environment and responding to where the user sees himself. Shouldn't we make an effort to reduce back office processes and focus on working with and for the people in communities, taking a demand led approach?

Position 11. Libraries have a better future when integrated in multifunctional service centres in smaller communities.

The smaller the community a library is serving, the closer it can relate to the local community and the more important it becomes as a third place. To accomplish this, the range of activities a library should offer would be expanded. Is this feasible? Wouldn't it be valuable to develop a policy in which smaller libraries can be developed into community centres, adding new people with new competencies to the library staff?

3.3.2 Public space

Public libraries are basic public services, accessible for all. Their service to the public should be aimed at the development of citizenship, participation in society, and the creation of meaning in a cultural sense.

Position 12. Public libraries should engage volunteers in many aspects of their work.

Throughout Europe during the 19th century, public libraries emerged through pioneering social movements. Only later on did they become agents of government. Would it be useful to find a solution for the repositioning of public libraries in creating a new co-ownership of public libraries, shared by the government and the local communities?

Position 13. Public libraries are joint partners with the public in enabling full use of the public domain

As managers of local public institutions, chief librarians ensure that the cultural public domain is accessible and visible in the public eye. Should this role be re-imagined in the light of digital demands?

4 Public Libraries on the European Agenda's

Some of the current agendas of the EU are immediately relevant to public library policy formulation. Or to reverse the argument, public libraries are working in several areas which are central to current EU led planning and development. These programmes include instruments which relate to cultural diversity and enriching cultural life; information and media literacy; learning; creating an inclusive society; creating new public (digital) spaces and (physical) places.

An essential part of the DNA of public libraries is its local identity, its proximity and local/ regional governance. It is a challenge for government to collocate the local library with partner organizations, each developing combined strategies, activities and campaigns, targeted at groups with changing concerns.

Position 14. The European Union can help local / regional governments in broadening their library policies.

The EU can take actions through a variety of instruments which help local / regional governments in actively coordinating actions, help them to align initiatives and strategies, and to ensure a fuller response in achieving targets set for shared agendas and policies, having regard to the principle of subsidiarity.

4.1 “Europe 2020”

The European Commission set the agenda of “Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” in March 2010. To tackle the three priorities in the title of the agenda, the Commission puts 7 flagship initiatives forward of which two are immediately relevant for public library policy.

1. “A Digital Agenda for Europe”

The Commission will work *“to promote internet access and take-up by all European citizens, especially through actions in support of digital literacy and accessibility”*.

Member States will need *“to promote deployment and usage of modern accessible online services (e.g. e-government, online health, smart home, digital skills, security)”*.

2. “European Platform against Poverty”

The aim is to ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion, building on the current *European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion* so as to raise awareness and recognise the fundamental rights of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, enabling them to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

Within this initiative the Commission will work:

“To transform the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection into a platform for cooperation, peer-review and exchange of good practice, and into an instrument to foster commitment by public and private players to reduce social exclusion, and take concrete action, including through targeted support from the structural funds, notably the ESF”

And

“To design and implement programmes to promote social innovation for the most vulnerable, in particular by providing innovative education, training, and employment opportunities for deprived communities, to fight discrimination (e.g. disabled), and to develop a new agenda for migrants’ integration to enable them to take full advantage of their potential”.

Member States will need *“To promote shared collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion”*.

Position 15. At European level, public library authorities should adopt strategies for an inclusive society.

Public library services work inclusively for the public purse and for the public at large, and in this way create opportunities for all and foster a more equal society. Digital

inclusiveness and the accessibility of culture activities and support complement more specialized actions and instruments in combating poverty.

4.2 “A Digital Agenda for Europe”

On May 19th 2010 the European Commission published “A Digital Agenda for Europe”.

“The objective of this Agenda is to chart a course to maximise the social and economic potential of ICT, most notably the internet, a vital medium of economic and societal activity: for doing business, working, playing, communicating and expressing ourselves freely. Successful delivery of this Agenda will spur innovation, economic growth and improvements in daily life for both citizens and businesses.

Wider deployment and more effective use of digital technologies will thus enable Europe to address its key challenges and will provide Europeans with a better quality of life through, for example, better health care, safer and more efficient transport solutions, cleaner environment, new media opportunities and easier access to public services and cultural content.”(p.3)

“Based on consultation with stakeholders and on the insights contained in both the Granada Declaration and the European Parliament Resolution, the Commission has identified the seven most significant obstacles. (...) The Digital Agenda for Europe frames its key actions around the need to systematically tackle these seven problem areas, which as a horizontal initiative spans, the three growth dimensions set out in Europe 2020.” (p. 5&6)

In relation to a public libraries policy two obstacles, and the actions to tackle them, are specifically relevant to furthering our support : ‘the lack of digital literacy and skills’; and, ‘missed opportunities in addressing societal challenges’.

Action 6. Enhancing digital literacy, skills and inclusion

“The digital era should be about empowerment and emancipation; background or skills should not be a barrier to accessing this potential.” (p.25)

Part of the actions proposed by the European Commission are:

- *Key Action 10: Propose digital literacy and competences as a priority for the European Social Fund regulation (2014-2020);*
- *Develop in 2011 an online consumer education tool on new media technologies (e.g. consumer rights on the internet, eCommerce, data protection, media literacy, social networks etc.). This tool will provide customised information and education materials for consumers, teachers and other multipliers in the 27 Member States;*

- *Propose by 2013 EU-wide indicators of digital competences and media literacy;*
- *Systematically evaluate accessibility in revisions of legislation undertaken under the Digital Agenda, e.g. eCommerce, eIdentity & eSignature, following the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;*
- *Based on a review of options, make proposals by 2011 that will make sure that public sector websites (and websites providing basic services to citizens) are fully accessible by 2015;*
- *Facilitate by 2012, in cooperation with Member States and relevant stakeholders, a Memorandum of Understanding on Digital Access for persons with disabilities in compliance with the UN Convention.*

Member States should inter alia.

- *Implement by 2011 long-term e-skills and digital literacy policies and promote relevant incentives for SMEs and disadvantaged groups;*
- *Mainstream eLearning in national policies for the modernisation of education and training, including in curricula, assessment of learning outcomes and the professional development of teachers and trainers.*

Position 16. There's a need for leadership in a pan-European approach to reposition public libraries.

Media literacy and digital skills have become essential to fully participate in our society. Public libraries can play a central role in providing facilities to ensure all citizens are availing of incentives and opportunities to participate at the digital world. A strong agenda platform for all policy levels and a robust focus on reimagining public library practice is a pre-requisite. The leadership which of the EU can garner towards public library policy is essential and the support arising from such endorsement should be made explicit where influence can lead to worthwhile outcomes.

Action 7.3. Promoting cultural diversity and creative content

The Commission will:

- *Key action 15: By 2012 propose a sustainable model for financing the EU public digital library Europeana and digitisation of content;*

Position 17. Public libraries should be positioned as the local entry into a comprehensive network of services including Europeana.

Europeana needs to network with public libraries to ensure that its services and content reach the public at large and to specific niche target groups. Europeana should evolve in to is a digital hub with a broad and multilayered network of institutions forming a European Public Library System. In order to fully exploit the possibilities of such an integrated approach an agreed digital strategy shared by institutions and organisations at European, national, regional and local level is imperative.

4.3 “The European Agenda for Culture”

The European Commission published a report “on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world”. On July 19th 2010 she published a report on “the implementation of the European Agenda for Culture” in May 2007.

The agenda states 3 objectives, two of which are relevant for public library policy:

1. *Cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue*

In the agenda the following specific objective is mentioned:

“Promote and strengthen intercultural competences and intercultural dialogue, in particular by developing ‘cultural awareness and expression’, ‘social and civic competences’ and ‘communication in foreign languages’, which are part of the key competences for lifelong learning identified by the European Parliament and Council in 2006”.

In the report of July 2010 objective the Commission further states its’ aims as.: *“Developing and strengthening synergies between education and culture”*; and *“stimulating awareness and actions concerning media literacy”*.

2. *Culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs*

According to the agenda the following specific objectives should be addressed:

- *Promote creativity in education by involving the cultural sector in building on the potential of culture as a concrete input/tool for life-long learning and promoting culture and arts in informal and formal education (including language learning).*
- *Promote capacity building in the cultural sector by supporting the training of the cultural sector in managerial competences, entrepreneurship, knowledge of the European dimension/market activities and developing innovative sources of funding, including sponsorship, and improved access to them.*

- *Develop creative partnerships between the cultural sector and other sectors (ICTs, research, tourism, social partners, etc) to reinforce the social and economic impact of investments in culture and creativity, in particular with regard to the promotion of growth and jobs and the development and attractiveness of regions and cities.*

This objective seems to stress the development and strengthening of the cultural and creative industries. This can be reformulated as part of a development and strengthening of the public library sector.

Position 18. On a European level actions should be taken to integrate librarians into education and lifelong learning

Knowledge is information in context. Libraries can contribute in the development of context for the general public, which makes them potentially an important instrument for educational and learning. The EU should embrace the role of (public) library authorities fulfil in partnership with educational institutions, teaching staff and having regard to the outcomes required from educational systems.

Position 19. On a European level the library profession should be promoted as a key profession supporting innovation, creativity and competitiveness

Public libraries are a professional sector reinventing their roles. The EC can enable this transition by formulating and endorsing the relevant new professional standards, adapting educational programs, circulating models for change management and developing campaigns to reflect the new roles in the labour market.

Position 20. Successful models of structuring library sectors which deliver economies of scale should be disseminated throughout the Member states.

Public libraries are the local node in a broad and multilayered network of library services integrates the service provision and maximise the value invested by the public purse.

Networks which are based on pragmatic decisions which achieve economies of scale can address national plans concerning literacy, information, knowledge, the digital revolution in a concerted approach. Europe can help to develop and disseminate best practice gleaned through integrating and aligning national, regional and local planning.

4.4 “New partnerships and working methods” in the European Agenda for Culture

In the European Agenda for Culture it is stated that, in order to be delivered, Europe must rely on a solid partnership between all actors, which has four essential dimensions:

1. *Further developing dialogue with the cultural sector*
2. *Setting up an open method of coordination* (to engage with other policy levels, the sector, and with civil society)
3. *Supporting evidence-based policy-making*
4. *Mainstreaming culture in all relevant policies*

The public library sector is an integral part of the cultural sector. Integrate it fully in the policy processes of the Commission is the logical next step.

Position 21. Europe should stimulate research on the role of public library work in society.

The dramatic changes presented through library work stimulate staff in new ways to relate to the public as citizens. The many domains in which public libraries are active place them in the forefront of new thinking on how to deliver public services. The outcome of the current challenges requires further investigation. The EC should stimulate research, evaluate new practices and experiments and add value to the results by incorporating them in instruments such as regulations, programs for innovation, project requirements.

Position 22. The EU Commission should initiate measures to integrate the combined Members State public library system in its statistics and impact measurements

Within the Agenda for Culture the Commission is developing methodologies for producing harmonised cultural statistics, and "*the Ministry of Culture of Luxembourg, will tackle the methodological framework of cultural statistics; CCIs; public and private expenditure on culture; and cultural participation and the social impact of culture*". To ensure accurate and relevant returns on public library datasets, it is important to consult national governments and experts in the library sector on the best way forward.

5 Context ECEI10

The European Congress on E-Inclusion 2010: 'Delivering Digital Europe in Public Libraries' (ECEI10) is an official Belgian Presidency Conference taking place on 20th and 21st September at the Flemish Parliament in Brussels. Hosted by the Flemish Community in association with Civic

Agenda, the conference is a follow up to the inaugural European Congress on E-Inclusion (ECEI09), "Technology and Beyond in Public Libraries", which took place in October 2009.

This conference forms part of the approach endorsed in the framework of the Belgian EU Presidency by the Flemish Community and will consider the vital role of public libraries in delivering a digitally inclusive Europe. Set over two days. The conference will seek to develop a forum for policy debate and create a networking opportunity that will bring together senior representatives from the 27 nations in the EU working with and in the public library sector with a view to increase e-inclusion and access to technology and to assist in combating poverty and social exclusion.

The ECEI10 agenda will seek to debate and examine the role of public libraries and the role they can play within this policy context. The conference programme will look at a range of areas including the opportunities public libraries have to bridge the digital divide; the role they can play to increase accessibility of services and information; and their role in supporting digital literacy programmes.

The conference programme will be structured around five key themes:

- 1) **European policy for public libraries: What to say, what to do?**
- 2) **New approaches to e-inclusion; technology and content**
- 3) **Public libraries building new partnerships for the future**
- 4) **Public libraries in an increasingly competitive market**
- 5) **Working with communities: social networking, communities of interest, crowd sourcing**

European policy for public libraries: what to say, what to do?

This workshop will build on the work of NAPLE/EBLIDA to create a policy for public libraries that could be adopted and promoted by the European Commission. There are clearly many similarities in the priorities and services across European public libraries and a policy might encourage wider sharing of experience and collaboration, raising standards and increasing citizen opportunity across Europe. A policy might also raise awareness of the important role of public libraries in other EU policy areas such as learning, inclusion, poverty and economic development. At the same time to be effective the policy would need to gain the support of a wide constituency of policy makers and professional and will thus need to provide agendas that were acceptable to a majority. The workshop will, therefore, be an ideal opportunity to debate the scope and purpose of the policy.