



THE NEVERENDING STORY: adapting public libraries in an ever-changing society

AS CONCLUSIONS

The Metropolitan Libraries section of IFLA held, from the 20th to 25th May, its annual conference in Barcelona, organised by the public libraries of the city and with the heading "The Never-ending story: adapting public libraries in an ever-changing society"

The Conference invited the directors from the main public libraries of the world, especially the European and North-American cities, to contrast visions and experiences, and to debate about the main topics that affect this library service. The meeting also gave them the opportunity of taking a closer look at the libraries of the host city. In this edition, the Conference was also opened up to directors of local libraries and professionals.

The contents focused on two major lines:

- The professional profiles of the public libraries
- How to manage in difficult times.

The inaugural session was given by Francisco Longo, general secretary of ESADE, with an intervention about *Public workers in times of change*.

He started with a reflection about the need to not be left with measures that in the present could seem to be necessary for containing the public deficit, with cutbacks and increases in taxes, but instead to orient ourselves more towards reforms that allow us to face the future in better conditions. He insisted on the importance of the public policies in the provision of services, but also in the need to introduce changes.

Francisco Longo highlighted the need to work on achieving a strong public administration, with regulatory capacity and without bureaucracies; that produce public services of quality with sustainable costs; that share talent with the productive sectors and that cooperate with entities and entrepreneurs. With this aim in mind, we should review the systems for the provision of services, analysing economies of scale, with a reduction in the costs of some central services, while searching for new sources of funding.

The public workers act in increasingly more diverse environments of contracting, more and more global, with more inter-disciplinary functions and with more open and horizontal labour relations and professional. These new situations bring with them a centrality of the need for ongoing training, for adapting to the new functions, and an increase in the flexibility and the capacity to adapt to the changes in the environment.

Control and evaluation will be much more habitual, with continual assessment of the resources used and of the impact of the services provided, where we will increasingly manage the services in coordination with other professionals, other institutions, or jointly with other administrations. The message is that the public workers have to work with "open doors and the lights on", being accountable and assuming responsibilities in front of those involved in the service, from the whole team to the users.

These were the main points of the talk that we started the Conference with.



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The two thematic sessions were structured around dialogues between the people in charge of two different libraries for each session, three communications about each of the two themes, and two workshops in which the attendees of the Conference participated in an open way.

The first dialogue *Professional profiles*, led by Liv Saeteren, from the Library of Oslo, was between Louise Guillemette-Labory, from the Library of Montreal, and Hans van Velzen, from the Library of Amsterdam. Each of the libraries has, due to its trajectory and context, very different profiles of its teams. In Montreal, the professionals are basically librarians. When formulating the Improvement Plan for the public libraries they needed to professionalise the teams. In Amsterdam the construction of the new building for the central library, with more than 15,000m², led to the incorporation of different profiles to the team. The context of training of librarians is also different in these two countries and this fact also explains the two realities.

In the dialogue there were two clear ideas shared, that were put forward as needs: the improvement of the leadership skills of the managers and the incorporation of flexibility in the definition of the functions of the teams.

The communications explained the needs of the library professionals of Stockholm, the professional development of the teams in Barcelona, and the initiatives in the definition of the profiles of the Library of Oslo for facing the opening of the new central library.

It is necessary to be aware of the fact, and accept, that the profession is changing.

These were some of the ideas and reflection that emerged from the talks and debates.

- The generalisation of the incorporation to the management teams of the libraries of non-librarian professionals
- The need to increase the leadership skills of the directors of public libraries and to incorporate flexibility in the definition of the functions of the teams
- The increase of the multi-disciplinary teams to the public libraries
- The centrality of the skills in marketing and communication
- The evaluation of the enthusiasm of the current professionals, but the need to be linked and involved in the global project of the library
- The importance of professional exchanges and of stays of other professionals in the libraries
- The commitment of the professionals with the community, based on their knowledge and with their involvement
- The value of internal information, in the two directions, from the management to the teams, and from the teams to the management.
- The need to make more visible the value of our work, with control, follow up and evaluation of the different projects and services.
- The importance of the balance in the teams of professionals with experience and trajectory, and of the youths with talent and new skills
- Differentiated professional profiles in the front office (user attention) and in the back office (more professional librarians) and also different profiles in the teams according to the size of the library.



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With regard to the session *How to manage in difficulty times*, led by Gerard Reussink, from the City Council of Rotterdam, with the participation of the Director of the Library from this city, Henk Koopman, and Thomas W. Galante from the Library of Queens, in New York.

The city of Rotterdam faced the early moments of the crisis with the reduction of the service points of the city and the concentration of the resources available in the Central Library. In Queens, on the other hand, faced with the reduction of the public contributions to the library, they decided to search for more private resources and to keep all the services open, adjusting the resources in other concepts.

With the communications of Singapore, Zaragoza and Bilbao experiences were presented in relation to the rationalisation of the resources, public-private cooperation and management, with the central idea that difficult times make better managers.

From this session we can highlight the following ideas:

- The importance of understanding the context of the difficulties
- The value of not working in the short term, orienting actions for the long term, and of being strategic
- The need for not being excessively pessimistic
- The need for decision taking with objective information about use, impact and costs
- The value of maintaining the knowledge of the teams, even if the work is divided up (increasing part-time contracts)
- The importance of not losing the social value of the public library service
- The importance of making everything that is invisible, visible
- The centrality of listening to the users and considering their priorities, making the users heard.
- The introduction of some technological initiatives (for example, radio frequency - RFID, or services of virtual reference) to be able to control the running costs better. Investing to save afterwards.
- Management by outsourcing some technical processes and services, with the aim of rationalising resources
- The centralisation of some technical processes, with the same aim of rationalisation
- Searching for new ways of fund-raising: renting spaces, selling products and services, introducing payment for some products, looking for sponsors for some programmes, publicity, etc.
- Applying a reduction of resources, more in internal services than in the attention to users.
- The improvement of the positioning of the public library as a service of the community with the construction of new facilities in strategic areas (Capital investments)
- Boosting access to electronic resources and digital loans
- Being alert to changes in the uses of the public libraries: online access to services and resources and the value of the spaces as a community centre

During the week, as well as visiting the Jaume Fuster Library, the venue for the Conference, there were also visits to 3 of the 38 libraries of the Network of the city: Sant Pau i Santa Creu Library, the library of Esquerra de l' Eixample–Agustí Centelles and the Trinitat Vella–J. Barbero Library. The conference attendees were also able to visit the Mercè Rodoreda Library of Sant Joan Despí and the



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Antonio Marín Library of Prat de Llobregat, as well as the Library of Catalonia, the Documentation Centre of the Picasso Museum, and the Archive of the Miró Foundation.

Despite the fact that the realities of the participating cities and the contexts of the librarians are very different, ideas and reflections emerged from the formal work and the more informal conversations that should help us to face the future of our own reality.

The public libraries have evolved a lot in our country. The quality and impact of the library service in our context is very high, with very tight public resources for maintaining this service, which do not reach 15 euros per inhabitant annually.

To be able to get here, it has been necessary to sum the circumstances with good will. In these moments, when we are beginning to note the real impact of the reduction of public resources in the services of the public libraries, and when the citizens need more than ever to be able to access these facilities and services, we should be capable of collectively valuing what the most suitable measures are and at the same time take strategic decisions that make it possible to achieve a recuperation of the levels reached in recent years.

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Biblioteques de Barcelona



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TECHNICAL DETAILS:

Organisation: Biblioteques de Barcelona
Technical office: Manners Congressos, S.L.
Dates held: from 20th to 25th May 2012

Number of enrolments: 93 people

From Catalonia: 61

Countries represented: 16

Number of speakers: 20 people

Visits:

- Public libraries: 6
- National libraries: 1
- Documentation centres of museums: 2

Sponsors: 3

- Counting Opinions
- Laie Catering
- Mobles 114

Collaborators: 7

- Town Council of Sant Joan Despí
 - Mercè Rodoreda Library
- Town Council of El Prat de Llobregat
 - Antonio Martín Library
 - Cèntric Espai Cultural
- Diputació de Barcelona (Provincial Council)
 - Palau Güell
 - Management Services of Libraries
- Generalitat de Catalunya (Regional Government)
 - Biblioteca de Catalunya
 - Library Service
- Miró Foundation
- Picasso Museum
- Faculty of Library Science and Documentation of the University of Barcelona



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COST OF THE 2012 EDITION

Incomes

Enrolments	€ 15,990
Sponsors	€ 2,293
Total	€ 18,283

Expenses

Organisation	€ 43,175.69
Rental of Palau Güell	€ 950.00
Total	€ 44,125.69

Deficit covered by Biblioteques de Barcelona: € 25,842.69

Stuart Brewer scholarship:

Provided for Metropolitan Libraries Section (IFLA):

- Number of grants: 2
- Total budget: € 1,500



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EVALUATION SURVEY

- How would you rate your overall satisfaction with MetLib 2012 ?
100% Very Satisfied

- How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the presentations?
83% Satisfied 16.6% Very Satisfied

- How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the tours?
16.6% Satisfied 83% Very Satisfied

- How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the social events?
83% Very Satisfied 16.6% no response

- How would you rate the interactive workshops?
50% Satisfied 50% Very Satisfied

- What suggestions do you have to improve the interactive sessions?
 - Use more media.
 - Perhaps we should ask the presenters specific questions and they should be speaking from their libraries' perspective. It is also good for them to share concrete ideas on what they have been doing rather than on a 'personal' response.
 - More time is needed for workshops. I learned more about other metro libraries through workshops rather than presentations.
 - Perhaps could have been moved along more quickly. Perhaps more formal presentations before the discussion groups instead of the "talk show" format.

- What did you like best about MetLib 2012?
 - Contact with friends and colleagues.
 - The new interactive style of discussions. A good start.
 - Opportunity to network and also discuss strategic issues that are pertinent to running Metropolitan Libraries.
 - There was a good blend of touring and presentations. I appreciated seeing some cultural sites as well as libraries. The theme anchored the presentations and generated good discussion. The keynote re the change in public service was an interesting, over-arching intro to the program that stepped us out of libraries for a moment to consider the larger picture.
 - I like best the right mix of presentations and professional visits.

- What did you like least about MetLib 2012?
 - I enjoyed every moment, thank you :)
 - It was hard to listen attentively to presentations very late in the day after touring.
 - I think that workshops were too short, there was not enough time to talk more deeply. Perhaps it's because it was the first time I attended the meeting.



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- What changes would you recommend for planning MetLib 2013?
 - Each country brings to the conference their own style - think we should leave to the country to plan rather than 'telling' a country what to do and what not to do.
 - Introduce more interactive sessions, this encourages a range of participants to have their voices heard. More time for questions and contributions after the presentations.
 - Better advance information. I would like to know how close hotels are to the conference venue, and receive as much as possible early to make travel plans. The program needs to be announced early. It is key to drawing attendance.
 - More time for workshops.
- Any other comments?
 - The best of Metlib is exchanging ideas and strategic developments.
 - No other comments - well done.
 - Conference well organised, I enjoyed the number of participants, it was easy to network and discuss real challenges at a similar level. Well done to the Catalonians and sponsors.
 - There seemed to be fewer presentations from members this time. Not sure if people didn't submit or didn't see the call for papers. I know I didn't see the call.
 - I'd like to emphasize the perfect organization.