



Parliamentary libraries: an uncertain future?

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Meeting:

90. Library and Research Services for Parliaments and Library History

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 75TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL

23-27 August 2009, Milan, Italy

<http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/index.htm>

Abstract

Parliamentary libraries are libraries serving the parliamentary institutions on a national or local level. Usually they were and are founded at the same time as the Parliament itself and are organised according to the parliamentary model of the country in which they are located. The parliamentary library's mission is to support and facilitate parliamentary activities and make available all the useful sources of information to the parliament as a whole. Thus, the parliamentary library is a specialised library from the point of view both of the collections' coverage and of patrons whom it is addressed.

Today, parliamentary libraries are at a turning point in their history. All over the world they are deeply changing their nature and experimenting new possibilities.

In particular, they are facing two main turnarounds:

- *the convergence towards a digital and networked society which is strongly affecting libraries of any type;*
- *the changing role of Parliaments: some scholars talk about a crisis of traditional parliaments as institutional places whereas some of the main decisions regarding political life and society are taken elsewhere.*

The internal fragmentation of parliamentary administration, the multiplication of search possibilities, the amount of topics debated every day and the need for information processed and immediately available for use are some of the reasons why the traditional parliamentary libraries are lagging behind in everyday parliamentary activities.

This is why parliamentary libraries are re-inventing themselves according to two main directions:

- *becoming internal documentation centres and integrating their services with other parliamentary offices and departments and, sometimes, giving up their physical structure;*
- *extending their role beyond the boundaries of the parliamentary library type and assuming other functions; according to this statement, some parliamentary libraries have opened to the general public; others have got the status of national libraries or have become central research libraries for a specific disciplinary field such as political science and law.*

In 1931 Ranganathan wrote: “libraries are living organisms”. If true, this means that they are expected to adapt themselves to the context in which they work, without giving up their inner mission and role in the society. How can parliamentary libraries face this challenge in a meaningful way?

1. Introduction

Parliamentary libraries serve the parliamentary institutions on a national or a local level.¹ Usually they are founded at the same time as the Parliament itself and are organised according to the parliamentary model of the country in which they are located. Therefore, if the parliament consists of only one chamber there is usually only one library, while if there are two chambers there are also two libraries. This is not true everywhere, because in many countries with two chambers there is only one library since the outset or the two existing libraries have been integrated by means of cooperation projects or unified in a single library.

The parliamentary library’s mission is to support and facilitate parliamentary activities and make available all the useful sources of information to the parliament as a whole. Thus, a parliamentary library is a specialised library from the point of view of the collections’ coverage and of patrons whom it is intended for as well.²

Apparently, everything is clear in the definition of parliamentary libraries and one definition seems to fit all the libraries and to justify the common affiliation to a specific category whose peculiarities require a characteristic approach and an autonomous branch of library science.

Nonetheless, I think it's time parliamentary libraries began to rethink themselves, starting from their origins and examining the current trends in their own development.

2. The origins of parliamentary libraries and library types

First of all, we have to trace the historical roots of parliamentary libraries, which are strictly linked to the birth of parliamentary institutions. Therefore, some of them date back to the first half of the 19th Century, while, in more recent democracies, parliamentary libraries have been founded not so long ago.³ Notwithstanding the different periods in which they have been created, it is worth highlighting that even the most recent parliamentary libraries have

¹ Milvia Priano, *Biblioteca parlamentare*. Roma, Associazione Italiana Biblioteche, 2000, p. 5-6.

² *Ibidem*.

³ For more information about the existing parliamentary libraries, consult the World Directory on the Bundestag Website: <https://www.bundestag.de/wissen/bibliothek/library/wd_e.html>.

been conceived following the characteristics and the baseline which have been applied to this type of libraries since the outset.

The appearance of the first parliamentary libraries did not automatically mean the need to differentiate these libraries from other special libraries on a theoretical basis, nor the need to create an autonomous identity. However, during the second half of the 19th century the process of library diversification into categories sped up,⁴ particularly in Great Britain and in the United States. This was a period of steady increase in number, aims and functions of libraries, due to different reasons: the economic growth and the increasing wealth, which provided resources to build cultural institutions and libraries; the population growth, which supplied working force to factories and industrial activities and on the other hand created a large public for cultural activities; the second phase of the industrial revolution, which required more and more sources of information and stimulated higher education levels of workers; the democratic nature of the Anglo-American society, which promoted self-development of citizens.

In particular, during the second half of the 19th Century, academic libraries proliferated thanks to increasing funding and the reform of education system, school libraries began to develop though they were not completely well-shaped before the 20th Century, special libraries serving public institutions and governmental bodies grew in number and quality, and, above all, public libraries were founded to address the needs of all citizens and were supported by the taxes paid by the local community.⁵

This quick *excursus* points out that the birth of different library types is the consequence of a historical process due to the development of libraries in general and the understanding of the many possible roles libraries could have inside the society. This process was the acting-out of a society which was moving towards a higher degree of specialisation and where the extensive and deep coverage in terms of services was considered a signal of advancement. Nowadays, we have to wonder whether there is the same need or if the surrounding circumstances are changing the inner perspective.⁶ To this end it is necessary to analyse the recent trends and their possible reasons.

3. Recent trends

⁴ Cfr. Michael H. Harris, *History of libraries in the Western world*, 4th ed. The Scarecrow Press, Lanham (Maryland) – London 1999.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Anna Galluzzi, *Biblioteche per la città. Nuove prospettive di un servizio pubblico*. Roma, Carocci, 2009, p. 137-144.

As already mentioned, for a long period of time, parliamentary libraries have had common characteristics and, notwithstanding the institutional differences between countries, have shared similar problems and needs. Nowadays, libraries in general, and even more parliamentary libraries, are going through a phase of transition and are trying to respond to many different challenges, and this can be done in many different ways.

At the moment, there seems to be two opposite trends in parliamentary libraries: the first one is towards the broadening of functions and user population beyond the boundaries of the parliamentary institution; the other one is towards a stronger specialisation of services and documents under a more strictly parliamentary point of view. Both these trends are the result of a changing context and are based upon agreeable theoretical grounds.

There are important examples of both choices, although each case is unique and each library has chosen its own way.

As far as the first trend is concerned, some parliamentary libraries, without changing their main mission and their policies, have opened to the general public, usually under a wider opening policy of the Parliament itself towards citizens and other institutions and an attempt to better defray expenses. For example, this is the case of the two Italian parliamentary libraries,⁷ now in the process of establishing a joint one,⁸ and of the Swedish parliamentary library.⁹ In other cases, parliamentary libraries have undertaken the role of national libraries or central research libraries for specific disciplinary fields, such as political science, law and administrative studies. For example, the parliamentary library of Finland¹⁰ is a national research library and has a central role in the research and academic libraries' network, while the parliamentary library of Estonia¹¹ is also the national library of the country, as it happens in Japan¹² too.

On the other hand, some parliamentary libraries have turned into documentation centres, integrating their services with other parliamentary offices and departments, mainly

⁷ Biblioteca del Senato "Giovanni Spadolini": <<http://www.senato.it/biblioteca>>; Biblioteca della Camera dei Deputati: <http://www.camera.it/serv_cittadini/1660/1662/1661/lista.asp>.

⁸ Il Polo bibliotecario parlamentare: <<http://www.parlamento.it/polobibliotecario/home.htm>>.

⁹ The Riksdag Library: <http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R_Page_832.aspx>. Cfr anche: Margareta Brundin, *Democracy building activities in the Swedish Riksdag; the role of a parliamentary library*, in *World Library and Information Congress: 70th IFLA General Conference and Council, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 22-27 August 2004*, <<http://archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/papers/166e-Brundin.pdf>> e Committee of the Nordic Parliamentary Librarians. *The parliamentary libraries of the Nordic countries and the other information and documentation services in the Nordic parliaments : Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, 2000*, <<http://lib.eduskunta.fi/dman/Document.phx?documentId=ea02507132910529&cmd=download>>.

¹⁰ The Eduskunta Library: <<http://lib.eduskunta.fi/Resource.phx/library/index.htm?lng=en>>; cfr. anche Committee of the Nordic Parliamentary Librarians. *The parliamentary libraries of the Nordic countries* cit.

¹¹ The parliamentary library of Estonia: <<http://www.nlib.ee/html/inglise/teen/parl.html>>.

¹² The National Diet Library of Japan: <<http://www.ndl.go.jp/en/index.html>>.

those involved in documentation activities, and sometimes giving up their physical structure. In some cases, parliamentary libraries have decided to bet everything in information services and document delivery, strengthening their electronic collection and looking to other specialised libraries when paper documents are needed. For example, this is the case of the Norwegian parliamentary library.¹³

As a matter of fact, the parliamentary libraries of the oldest democracies are changing and are in search of their own way to fulfil their mission and to re-gain a meaningful role inside the institution and the national library system. On the other hand, the parliamentary libraries founded in the new democracies are surprisingly much more similar to the original model than the oldest ones and much more traditional.¹⁴ In my opinion, this phenomenon is perfectly consistent with the above-mentioned trends, because those trends are connected to some changes in context which are affecting some world areas more than others, particularly in the Western world. Consequently, new democracies and new parliamentary libraries, which are mostly located in developing countries, are less affected by the evolving needs of the Western society.

Now, it's about understanding why the oldest parliamentary libraries are moving towards these directions and which are the external and institutional inputs they are trying to respond to.

4. Why these changes

Certainly, there are multiple reasons explaining the current situation of parliamentary libraries and their recent trends.

In order to facilitate the analysis, I'm going to focus the search for reasons on three main areas: how parliamentary institutions and political life are changing, how user habits and cultural approaches are moving on, how everything is being affected by the digital revolution.

¹³ The Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget): <<http://www.stortinget.no/en/>>; cfr. anche Committee of the Nordic Parliamentary Librarians. *The parliamentary libraries of the Nordic countries* cit.

¹⁴ An example of a recently founded parliamentary library is the Iraqi parliamentary library, whose staff and internal organization show an enthusiastic adhesion to the original spirit of these libraries as vital engines of the legislative process and instruments for democracy.

4.1. How parliamentary institutions are changing

First of all, there is no doubt that in the Western world, parliamentary institutions are deeply changing if compared with their origins and many phenomena are differently shaping parliaments and political life.

Many scholars talk about a decline process of the parliamentary assemblies and point out the reasons which stand behind this situation.¹⁵ First of all, there is no doubt that, nowadays, parliaments are not the one and only main place for the political debate nor the only institution having a representative role.

Moreover, the process of law-making faces new challenges. First of all, there is a need for high-level technical specialisation in order to manage the increasing complexity of the topics on the agenda; consequently, an increasing number of external experts, groups and institutions are involved in the law-making process. Secondly, assemblies are often asked to simply ratify - without a serious debate - decisions and agreements reached through mutual consensus outside the parliaments or to transfer governmental initiatives into laws, while, at the same time, the governmental legitimacy is only formally held by parliaments, but effectively lies in the political search for equilibrium among parties. Someone stresses the fact that, by now, general interests are usually safeguarded outside parliaments, while only particular interests are debated in parliaments. The parliamentary debate has partially moved outside the parliamentary institution and has invaded mass media, private communities, lobbies and so on.

Furthermore, we have to highlight the decisive decrease in citizens' participation in elections and political life, which is considered another signal of political crisis by a number of scholars and columnists. Citizens are more and more uninterested in traditional forms of political life and ask for a deeper and innovative involvement in the management of public affairs.

Therefore, the balance between institutions inside the state organisation and other political and social actors is shifting and the way in which political life interacts with social life and weighs upon citizens' behaviours is very different from the past

¹⁵ See Andrea Deffenu, *Forme di governo e crisi del parlamentarismo*. Torino, Giappichelli, 2006; Alfio Mastropaolo - Luca Verzichelli, *Il parlamento. Le assemblee legislative nelle democrazie contemporanee*. Roma, Laterza, 2006; Chiara De Micheli - Luca Verzichelli, *Il parlamento*. Bologna, IL Mulino, 2004; Giovanni Sartori, *Ingegneria costituzionale comparata*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000; Augusto Barbera, *I parlamenti. Un'analisi comparativa*. Bari, Laterza, 1999; *The evolving role of parliaments in Europe*, edited by Cees Flinterman, Aalt Willem Heringa, Lisa Waddington. Apeldoorn: Maklu, 1994.

While important aspects of the law-making process move outside the parliaments, on the other hand, legislative and non-legislative activities and acts have gradually increased and are further increasing in number, variety and level of specialisation. Consequently, the internal organisation of parliaments has become more and more complex over time and, nowadays, the number of departments managing documentation is far higher than in the past. The amount of documents produced by parliaments or necessary to respond to their needs is so huge that the only way to manage them is a cooperative effort by different subjects.

These opposite trends determine paradoxical situations. While parliaments are overcrowded with documents and expand in a redundant way, more and more laws come directly from government's initiative and are passed thanks to governmental majority, nearly without debate and amendments.

These trends are particularly evident if compared with parliaments in new democracies. In fact, in countries which have recently switched over to parliamentary systems, parliaments tend to be more traditional as they are inspired to the original institutional arrangement of this form of government and citizens tend to be much more interested in political participation and tied to the classic idea of democracy as the result of an on-going debate between opposite parties and ideas.

Nonetheless, a point of view which counters recent declining parliaments as pointless and redundant institutions which undersign decisions taken outside with an original idea of parliaments as the place of popular sovereignty is theoretically feeble. Parliaments, as any other social and political institution, must evolve alongside the society and its needs, in search of ever-new equilibriums. At the same time, their internal organisation must change and adapt to changing requirements.

At last, it is worth mentioning another overall trend recognisable in developed countries, i.e. the trend towards efficiency and cost reduction, which is much more important in the current economic situation. The need for a stricter budget control and a renovated legitimacy, together with requests of transparency and involvement by citizens, pushes parliamentary institutions towards a deeper exploitation of their resources and the proposal of services to the general public.

All these aspects should be analyzed together with the observation of the current internal use of parliamentary libraries and the most common practices and rules applied, in order to point out possible links between general trends and internal statistics. Most of the existing parliamentary libraries have been highlighting a decreasing use by internal users for the last years, while requests for consultation by external users and scholars have

proportionally increased. At the same time, institutional users more and more often ask parliamentary libraries for services responding to other needs (related to their own life or to personal research interests) rather than to institutional needs. The same happens for retired members of parliament and staff, which are considered primary users by many parliamentary libraries and so have a right to access all the library services and to be primarily served by the library staff, regardless of the fact that they still have active roles in the parliamentary or political life or not.¹⁶

Each of the highlighted trends would deserve an in-depth examination in order to recognize possible changes in the role and organization of parliamentary libraries.

4.2 The consequences of digital revolution

Parliamentary libraries show the effects of the above-mentioned internal changes, but also take part in the shifting process which is affecting libraries in general because of the digital revolution and the consequent changing habits of users.¹⁷

The digital revolution is a wide phenomenon which cannot be summarised in a few words. With respect to libraries, the two most important aspects of this revolution are the creation of a global network which allows people all over the world to be constantly and promptly in touch and the convergence of all media towards digital format.

These two trends directly affect libraries under many points of view and, above all, deeply modify the society as a whole and the way in which people relate with each other and go through their everyday life.

There is no doubt that the digital revolution is putting library identity under pressure, insofar as the majority of information sources are going digital, most of the reference transactions are moving towards the network, the physical premises of libraries are becoming less important, the mediation role is being overcome by Internet access and the number of competitors in the field of media offering is constantly increasing.

¹⁶ Cfr. June Verrier, *Successful delivery of professional and non-partisan services in a partisan environment. On socks and bees and everything in between: navigating the political environment - culture, constraints and controversies*, in *World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council, Berlin, 1-9 August 2003*, <<http://archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/165e-Verrier.pdf>>.

¹⁷ Galluzzi, *Biblioteche per la città* cit., p. 46-70, 144-150; see also the results of this survey concerning the way in which the so-called "next generation" faces life, politics and society: <<http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/300.pdf>>. An important book referring to changing users' habits in a digital context is: Chris Anderson, *The long tail: how endless choice is creating unlimited demand*. London : Random House Business Books, 2007. A good reference regarding some features of the current approach to private and public services is: B. Joseph Pine II - James H. Gilmore, *The experience economy: work is theatre & every business a stage*. Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 1999.

Some scholars and many librarians point out a risk of marginalisation of libraries in the new global and digital framework. According to this opinion, libraries should - on the one hand - focus on the most traditional and peculiar functions, like preservation of historical contents, and - on the other one - contribute to the global availability of these sources in a digital format. Therefore, under this perspective, the future library will take up a very small niche of the information society and is supposed to look after very specific activities intended for restricted groups of users.

On the other hand, the success of the Internet and its evolution towards the so-called Web 2.0 affect users' behaviour as well. In particular, users are far less available to use their scarce time for activities which could be carried out the same over the Internet, above all those activities which do not belong to spare time, but to obliged or bound time. It is worth clearing up that, according to sociological studies, obliged time encompasses all those activities which cannot be avoided and cannot be freely managed during the day and the week, like work and school, while bound time refers to all those activities which are necessary for our life and can be planned only to a limited extent, like administrative proceedings and medical examinations.¹⁸

Secondly, users are more and more used to the "one-stop-shop" approach and prefer service points and places where more than one activity and need can be satisfied. Moreover, it must be stressed that the unique character of the Web as a vessel in which all digital contents merge into, independently of level of specialisation or provenience, has emphasized the "one stop shop" approach of users towards services not only over the Web, but also in real life.¹⁹

Thirdly, some aspects of users' lives are merging and this is particularly true for everything pertaining to education and entertainment. Scholars talk about an edutainment society to highlight the fact that work, study, cultural activities, hobbies and spare time are mixed up in everyday life and are not linked to different moments of the day or of the week nor to different periods of life anymore.

Libraries must take into account these changes in behaviours; one of the main consequences could be a need to rethink the library types, particularly for libraries over a certain size.

¹⁸ *La domanda e i consumi culturali*, «Economia della cultura», 2, 12 (2002), pp. 153-229. In particolare: *Introduzione*, pp. 153-6; Michele Trimarchi, *Dentro lo specchio: economia e politica della domanda di cultura*, pp. 157-70; Giuseppe Richeri, *Il fattore tempo nel consumo di beni culturali*, pp. 171-8; Fabio Guerra, *Le tendenze nel consumo del tempo libero in Europa*, pp. 215-29.

¹⁹ *Perceptions of libraries and information resources. A Report to the OCLC Membership*, OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Dublin (Ohio) 2005, <http://www.oclc.org/reports/pdfs/Percept_all.pdf>.

Nowadays, many different kinds of libraries are recognizable under the library label as a consequence of a process of diversification linked to a growing specialization of society needs, insomuch as sometimes it is hard to find a common ground for these institutions. However, nowadays maybe similarities are becoming much more important than differences, particularly as there is a general trend emphasizing convergence in usage. This trend pushes towards a decrease in the number of library categories to such an extent that, in some cases, the traditional classification can turn into a weighty historical heritage more than a useful management tool.

There is no doubt that the library categorization which started to emerge since the end of the Eighteenth Century is now showing its rigidity and is marking its time. Therefore, maybe it would be time for libraries to rethink their position with respect to their users' needs. In particular, parliamentary libraries must face the crisis of parliamentary institutions in the Western democracies, identify their role and express all their potentials.

Moreover, the changing characteristics of knowledge and its evolving relationship with the digital framework should be taken into account as another phenomenon affecting the nature of parliamentary libraries and of libraries in general and deserving to be thoroughly studied. In particular, the interdisciplinary character of knowledge, together with the mix of theoretical, organizational and practical knowledge, has deeply modified the way in which research is carried out as well as the nature of its contents. Together with a growing specialization of the single disciplinary fields, there is a need for hybridising disciplines and a decreasing gap between popular and academic knowledge.

Consequently, the range of interests expressed by users is, at the same time, wider and deeper and far less foreseeable than in the past. Evidently, it is impossible that one single library could have everything a user needs, because physical constraints limit the endless possibilities; however, each library should be the front-office of services and contents - both immediately available and remote - in a transparent way. In addition, libraries should make available all digital contents in an integrated manner or searchable in an integrated way. The long tail paradigm²⁰ points out that libraries need to strike a balance between physical coverage and digital or remote availability in order to remain sustainable from an economical point of view. In my opinion, depending on the library type, its size, primary role and characteristics, some libraries should go completely digital, achieving their mission in connecting pieces of information and making them readily available for users, others should

²⁰ Anderson, *The long tail* cit.

enhance and broaden their offer in terms of bibliographic material and services and focus on the added value of physical and social exchange.

Not even parliamentary libraries can avoid to cope with these new challenges and need to make their mission clear in order to choose an effective development strategy; however, it seems that parliamentary libraries are not sufficiently used nor longing for this kind of analysis.

Actually, a quick look into scientific and professional literature specifically regarding parliamentary libraries²¹ points out that the overall number of papers in the last ten years is small and most of them are focused on one library, describing its history, collections and services, or on specific projects carried out by one or more parliamentary libraries.

Very few essays are aimed at thinking about nature and role of parliamentary libraries; it is quite inevitable to get the feeling that the majority of parliamentary librarians take themselves for granted and, apart from some common basic characteristics, are strictly bounded to their specific library and not very interested in wider considerations on parliamentary libraries in general and in the search of possible common grounds with other types of libraries. This is not only true for parliamentary librarians, but for librarians in general. Even internal relationships with other research and documentation departments inside their institutions are not so often at the centre of the debate and, if this is the case, libraries are much more worried to preserve their existence than to think about better ways to serve their institutions; they are not ready to completely change their perspective if necessary.

Obviously, there are also numerous exceptions and many contributions by scholars and librarians are enlightening to this respect. However, there is no doubt that libraries in general, and parliamentary libraries in particular, tend to be self-referential and this could be a great risk in an era which is learning to live without libraries.

5. Conclusions

Analyzing and comparing the trends pertaining parliaments and those referred to libraries, the need for second thoughts about the role of parliamentary libraries seems necessary. The answer is not easy nor obvious and the simple application of a theoretical model cannot work because the "one-fits-all" approach does not match the current multifaceted situation.

²¹ To this end it is possible to use one of the oldest and most important bibliographic database concerning library science, LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts): <<http://www.csa.com/factsheets/lisa-set-c.php>>.

As observed at the beginning, over the last years parliamentary libraries seem to have evolved in two main different shapes. Let's start again from that point to check if these two strategies comply with the highlighted challenges.

At this stage, the two possibilities at stake become clearly understandable and can be seen as common to libraries in general: on the one hand, widening their range of activities and competences, on the other hand, focusing on a strictly specialised role (parliamentary role, in this case) and relying mostly on digital services. As far as parliamentary libraries are specifically concerned, they have to wonder if they are born either to support and facilitate parliamentary activities or to serve members of parliament and staff members regardless of the aim of their searches. Otherwise, they should imagine new strategies linked to the current trends and choose innovative directions, although consistent with their nature and their mission.

According to the first strategy, parliamentary libraries are supposed to broaden their functions beyond the institutional needs and address their services to a larger public, which could be a specialised public or the general public of citizens. This way, they can function as a link between the parliamentary institutions and the citizens, contributing to increasing transparency and better knowledge of sources and ways of legislative activity.

This can be done in a number of ways, for example experimenting new forms of agreement with other libraries of the local network or, if possible, promoting forms of joint-use libraries inside the same building, or creating new services in the old library.

The underlying idea driving this change should be a new way of categorizing users. In my opinion, users should be considered not as belonging to a stable category (student, scholar, member of parliament, parliamentary administrator and so on), but as bearing multiple needs in different moments and under different aspects of their lives. For example, a single person could be a member of parliament (with all the connected needs), but also a scholar or a lawyer from a professional point of view and a simple citizen interested in various kinds of hobbies from a private point of view.

In the past, the answer to this situation was the existence of different kinds of libraries where users were addressed according to their needs; nowadays, all the above-mentioned phenomena suggest a new approach. After all, the fact that some parliamentary libraries already have some collections of travel literature and fiction and these kinds of material are appreciated by institutional users proves that they already act towards library in a hybrid manner.

Inside this framework, parliamentary libraries, which suffer of funding cuts less than other libraries and usually continue to have high funding at their disposal, cannot allow themselves to stay out of the picture and are supposed to assume a leading role in the national library system, even incorporating other library types and other functions.

From the opposite point of view, parliamentary libraries should move towards the essential and develop their digital services at the highest degree. In these cases, they must remain close to the parliamentary activities, carrying out a strictly documentation role and cooperating with other parliamentary offices and departments. We could label this choice in the following way: "being a library without looking like one". In order to face these issues and to keep a tight link with parliamentary activities, parliamentary libraries should completely change their appearance, their way of working and their priorities, giving up all the redundant aspects and focusing on high specialised and trained information specialists, on the widest possible digital collection and on an efficient local library and information network. From this point of view, some parliamentary libraries are experimenting the 24/7 opening and availability of open-shelf collection and some services for internal customers as a powerful retention tool for both old and new customers.

To sum everything up, we could say that, in order to recover a role, parliamentary libraries should concentrate on that specific spot which is not covered by other subjects or meet more needs than in the past. After all, many public and private services around us are at the same crossroads and are moving towards one direction or the other. In both cases, there could be a renewed and recognizable added value of library services in the users' opinion.

In the end, are parliamentary libraries as traditionally conceived disappearing? Maybe. For sure, they are deeply changing. Is that good or not? I think it is not a matter of goodness. As Ranganathan wrote as long ago as 1931 "libraries are living organisms". If true, this means that they are expected to adapt themselves to the context in which they work, without giving up their inner mission and role in the society, and to give up a barren protection of theoretical prerogatives.