Public libraries and newcomers

Rafiq and Issam

Stijn Callewaert

OBiB – Brussels Public Library Network
Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie Brussels
Brussels network of public libraries

- 20 Flemish libraries
- Working in a superdivers context
- Integrated network
- Shared vision/common outreaching projects
- OBiB: the support platform for the libraries (IT + education)
Rafiq en Issam

Diversity of the city!
- 1.191.604 inhabitants (2017)
- 34,8% foreign nationality
  - 23,1% EU
  - 11,7% non EU
- 179 different nationalities (2017)
- Approx. 30% of school children speak other languages than French/Dutch at home (2014)

Diversity in the library?
- 40.906 customers (children/adults) in Flemish libraries = 3,4% (2017)
- Approx. 150 different nationalities, but only 2276 non EU customers = 5,6% (2017)
- 11,8% of books in other languages than Dutch
- Hardly any newcomers in library staff, library councils, among volunteers...

Super-diversity

A long way to go...
What is in the word “public”?

- “Being there”
- Organization/service-based
- Intra muros
- For the happy few

- “The library is open all week long; people just need to find us and to make use of our services”

- “How can people find us?”
- Customer-based
- Extra muros: outreaching
- For all. A human rights’ approach: the library as a fundamental right (access to information, knowledge, leisure, culture...).
- Libraries need to step towards their potential users. Towards newcomers in particular
What is the role the public library can play for/with Rafiq and Issam?

Examples from the Brussels public libraries network
Boekstart

The libraries try to convince young parents to read to their baby. The central message is clear: “It is never too early to start reading to your child”.

- The Brussels libraries all have Bookstart collections (carton, plastic books...)
- Book gift at the age of 6 and 15 months
- Libraries are present in all Brussels Family Centers
- Close collaboration with kindergartens
- Special training for library staff (language development, story telling, communication skills...)

welkom in de bibliotheek!
Boekenbende

The libraries try to motivate families to read to their children by sending out readers/reading ambassadors to families.

- Volunteers/students go reading at home for at least 5 subsequent weeks (1 hour/week)
- Newcoming families are the target group of this project
- Special attention for home languages
- At least one visit to the nearest by public library

- Intensive partner project in which libraries, primary schools and institutions of higher education are closely working together
- Each year at least 250 families take part in the project
- Unique project that started 21 years ago in Brussels
Brussels Reads Aloud

Through multilingual storytelling, the libraries try to give more space to the home languages spoken in Brussels.

- Multilingual reading aloud sessions: Dutch in combination with one or more other languages
- Storytellers from different language communities
- Traditional stories from the various communities
- Collaboration with various external partners (e.g. Foyer)
- Brussels Reads Aloud festival once a year
Arabic collection

The libraries try to set up a high quality collection in different languages. Special focus on newcomers.

An Arabic collection is the first result of a new approach.

- Participation and dialogue: customer based approach through a resonance group
- October 2017: 400 titles in 3 libraries
- Particular attention to promotion and communication throughout the Brussels library network
- Special activity program around the collection (e.g. Brussels Reads Aloud)

Similar approach for other newcomers’ languages and communities in Brussels: Russian, Romanian, Spanish, Portugese, Bulgarian...
Language courses

How to learn Dutch/other languages? The libraries offer a special collection of language courses:

- High quality offer
- Advice by trained staff
- Easy level label system
- Special attention to newcomers: easy readings combined with the Daisy book, different instruction languages, Dutch Daisy versions of books people have already read in their mother tongue
- Close collaboration with the main reference organizations for Dutch language learning (Huis van het Nederlands, Brusselleer, Luisterpunt)

Libraries also organize activities with/for Dutch language learners:

- Conversation tables
- Guided introductions in the library
**Introduction visits**

The libraries welcome on a regular basis groups for an introductory visit to the library.

- Focus on newcomers
- Interactive approach (e.g. “Meet the author”)
- Library visit often prepared in the class before
- Close collaboration with external partners who work with newcomers (Huis van het Nederlands, BON, Brusselleer, CVO)
- Introductory visit in Dutch or in other languages
- Focus on what the library can offer:
  - Books in different languages
  - Internet
  - Library as a meeting place
  - Children’s collection/activities
  - …
- Main message: feel welcome in *your* library
Welcoming Rafiq and Issam

There is much more we could do for Rafiq and Issam

• More outreaching work: go the places where our public comes/lives (higher presence in schools, family centers, preschool organizations...; home visits)

• More attention to the social function of the library: space for meeting and discussion, free coffee, newspapers and magazines...

• More shared ownership of the library: invite newcomers to organize activities in our libraries, to actively intervene in the acquisition policy of the library

• More attention to communication with/for newcomers
Question? More information?

• [www.brusselsebibliotheken.be](http://www.brusselsebibliotheken.be)
• [www.boekenbende.be](http://www.boekenbende.be)

• Stijn Callewaert
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