EBLIDA

European Bureau
of Library,
Information and
Documentation Associations

How to Build Up a Europe of Knowledge - Count on Libraries!

European Conference on Information Literacy – 21-25 October 2013, Istanbul, Turkey.

Outline of the Discussion in this session:

"Literacy... means far more than learning how to read and write... The aim is to transmit... knowledge and promote social participation."

UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg, Germany

Literacy is a complex combination of a wide variety of literacies. Literacy in general refers to the ability to read and understand a text. But Literacy covers in fact a wide range of sub-categories such as Information Literacy, Financial Literacy, Health Literacy and last but not least, Numeracy.

In the panel, we combine different examples showing that whatever form literacy takes, libraries have an important role to play to build up a Europe of Knowledge.

Who are we?

- Vincent Bonnet, the Director of the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Association (EBLIDA) will draw an outline of European Policies and how EBLIDA and its expert group on Culture and Information Society (EGCIS) work on Literacy issues at the European level (www.eblida.org).
- Marian Koren, also member of EBLIDA EGCIS, director FOBID Netherlands Library Forum. She gives an overview of the last OECD report (www.oecd.org/site/piaac/publications.htm) on literacy/numeracy as well as share information on the Dutch National Literacy Campaign.
- Aldo Pirola, chair of the EBLIDA EGCIS, director of Milan Public Libraries, presents concrete actions in the Library system of the city of Milan where a focus has been put on developing skills in Information Literacy. Additionally he also tells you about a project on financial literacy developed in Belgrade (Serbia).

With this combination of different examples addressing different forms of literacy and check against the European Agenda, we are expecting you to intervene and exchange with us and would like to get an answer to the question 'Do you think of libraries as partners?".

European Policies, EBLIDA and Literacy

1/ European Policies tend to promote a Europe of Knowledge based on skilled workers, empowered people, all actions that promote the role of individuals in the society, at work etc…

The overall idea (or ideal) is that an educated population is the major driving force for a prosperous society. In reality we are quite far from this ideal, but the idea is there.

How could the European Union reach this ambitious target?

The question, for us, is what structure is existing all over Europe, which is open to everybody, works to improve access to information, knowledge, culture, education and leisure? The library!

Libraries all over Europe form a network of about 70.000 entities which is of benefit to every European. Their work and services are closely related to many of the Europe 2020 targets including lifelong learning, a digital agenda and cultural creativity. Libraries assist in finding solutions to the many challenges encountered when trying to reach these targets (fighting poverty and unemployment, promoting cultural diversity, enhancing [digital] knowledge skills).

A recent survey on the use of ICT in libraries in Europe shows that almost 1 in 4 Europeans used a Public Library in the past 12 months (Cross-European survey to measure users' perceptions of the benefits of ICT in public libraries, http://issuu.com/civicagenda/docs/260113096_cross-european_libraries_survey_report_f?e=5419856/2526039). This are huge numbers!
Libraries actively contribute to the empowerment of European citizens and to a sustainable knowledge-based Europe. However, a clear strategy with all stakeholders involved is urgently needed.

2/ A few words on EBLIDA.
EBLIDA is an independent umbrella association of library, information, documentation and archive associations and institutions in Europe. We are representing 116 members of 37 European countries (including all EU members-states).
Our main work is to lobby the EU institutions on topics related to libraries, such as copyright or literacy. We have several expert groups each dedicated to special issues.
The Expert Group on Culture and Information Society (aka EGCIS) has the mission to *Investigate and analyse the European agenda on culture and information society (including Literacy and Media Literacy) issues.*
This point has been added to the agenda of the group 2 years ago because Literacy (in all its formats, Media, Information Literacy) has become an utterly important issue on the European Agenda.
Since then, EBLIDA worked out some position papers and actions as follows:

In 2011, EBLIDA released a position paper: Libraries – cultural peaks for information and inspiration
where we highlighted several points, such as: *libraries are found exactly where they are needed – close to all groups of citizens, in the city, in suburbs; and they are open for everybody. + promote cultural activities and intercultural dialogue*.
In 2011, EBLIDA provided input to the High level Group on Literacy set up at the EU level. To the question *What do you see as your role in meeting the challenges of improving literacy policies at the EU level?*
EBLIDA answered: *As a library organisation and at a larger scale, EBLIDA works for an EU policy in which the major roles of libraries in the field of literacy, reading, education, culture and science are acknowledged and supported*.
Eventually we participated in the official launch of the report.
In 2013, EBLIDA was requested as consultant by the Greens at the European Parliament on the question of Literacy and the role of libraries on this issue;

3/ What is necessary in the EU to recognize the role of Public Libraries?

A written Declaration on the impact of Public libraries in European Communities. This written declaration has been launched at the end of the *Cycling for libraries* event in Brussels by the end of June 2013. But its official released is 7th October 2013.
This written Declaration highlights some interesting figures. But furthermore, it gives MEPs the opportunity to join; and in a pre-electoral period, it can be used on their political agenda.
For instance a French MEP who signed the Declaration declares:

"*In this declaration we call on the Commission to acknowledge the essential role of public libraries in social cohesion, education, learning, access to culture and insertion of disadvantaged population*."
She also highlights that "*the EU should promote a real policy towards libraries to favor their development and the shift towards digital era with funding and adapted regulations.*"
EBLIDA supports this action and asks its members to contact their local MEP to ensure they will sign the declaration.
In 2013, EBLIDA participates in the call for application to the European Network of Literacy Organisations. This ELINET (as it's called) is 'under construction' (application is ongoing).
The purpose of it is to coordinate actions at the European level regarding Literacy issues. The role of EBLIDA in this network is to ensure that libraries are visible as partners in literacy and take part in this project.

To wrap up, EBLIDA's role is to ensure that Libraries are always visible on the agenda of politicians and policy makers. By an active involvement with the Commission and the Parliament we are playing our role as library advocacy association, and raise awareness on library issues, in order to influence the political agenda of the EU, and the impacts of its poliies and regulations on library mission and practices, affecting the lives of European citizens.
We believe that without libraries, promotion of literacy will lack efficiency by missing local relays and roots.
But a European policy can exist ONLY if good national policies are in place.

National actions, the focus on the Netherlands and the OECD report by Marian Koren.

Literacy, Information Literacy and Libraries - example of national policies in the Netherlands
The EU Lisbon strategy 2000 gave an impulse to a National Action Plan of the Dutch Government, and to raise awareness about the phenomenon of low-literacy and the impact of this on the persons themselves, especially for their participation in daily life, work and social participation. At the same time, a knowledge society is losing competitiveness, when job workers are lagging behind in skills as literacy, numeracy and problem solving in a technology-rich environment. Lifelong Learning was introduced, and, unlike the 'permanent education' slogan of the 1960ies, this social aim was framed in economical and financial terms.
Research showed that in the Netherlands around 10 % of the population had very low proficiency in literacy. This means around 1,1 million people (age16-65), of which 250.000 are illiterate, others - both Dutch natives and immigrants - are lacking certain skills.
The persons concerned would not call themselves illiterate and would not like to be stigmatized as such. At this point still a lot of advocacy has to be done. Librarians were trained to new approaches: 'We think that talking about being 'in need of some essential basic skill' either digital or in text, - which can be the case for almost anybody-, will make the motivation to improve skills a more common issue. The public libraries are a good place to reach and serve the general public in this respect.'
Public libraries have responded, both to the need of creating awareness, and of providing services. A policy was developed to provide adapted language and information materials, and stimulate a local and regional cooperation with partner organizations and businesses. It has been proved that the public library is a good partner and place to offer educational services. The library buildings are wide-spread in the country and in the immediate neighbourhood. The library may serve many objectives including a local service desk or job search service. The learning environment in the public library can be inspiring and is generally well equipped with computer facilities. Focus of the libraries is on good facilities and the display of an adapted book collection.

The demand of 'easy-to-read' books for adults will be growing in the coming years. This is due to some national programs that are launched by the government, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in 2011. A national Action Plan '*Literacy in the Netherlands*' was launched at the international Literacy Day 8th September 2011 and will be elaborated from 2012-2015. One of the main stakeholders is the Reading&Writing Foundation, an active campaign and programme organization presided by Princess Laurentien, member of the royal family. In one of the national programs 'Language for Life', language teachers are trained to coordinate the work of volunteers in society who mentor adults learning the Dutch language in all kind of settings. In cooperation with the national Support office for Adult Education, these two organizations develop criteria for books compatible with the standard criteria for general literacy levels. More and more books go with digital applications and the patrons of public libraries often prefer to study on the internet. A national library committee organizes the copyrights for the display of a few selected e-learning products for low literate adults in the public libraries.

In the Netherlands it took intensive campaigning to come to a broader display of the language facilities in the public libraries. The last three years, programs have been carried out to combine the display of collections and digital tools with training programs for the target group and intensify the cooperation with educational institutions and volunteer groups. The language spaces for adults have names as: NL-point; Reading&Writing or Language&Work square. Nowadays, in these particular spaces one will find collections for Dutch citizens of foreign backgrounds as well as special materials for learners with Dutch as first language to practice and intensify their reading skills.

For this very reason the public libraries also offer spaces for e-learning and an interesting program to train general information skills. Nowadays, apart from the books, one may find a program like www.oefenen.nl on the computers; or the 'Slimme Nieuwslezer' of Edia.nl. This newsreader is a digital newspaper that generates automatically easy-to-read articles about selected topics.

The national project plan for libraries '*The library as connecting link. The role of the library in the Action Plan Low literacy 2012-2015 'Literacy in the Netherlands'* outlines the three action lines along which libraries contribute in combatting low literacy. These actions are related to: Education, Business sector and Family & Health. The library is not only a connecting partner for reading and writing skills, but also a facilitating partner for all basic skills, including digital information literacy, financial, social, legal and health skills. The Dutch Foundation Reading and Writing raised the need to focus also on the business community and has supported projects for cooperation.

As a total programme it creates a strong coherence and connects policy strategy, professionalization, products and services, marketing, research and financing. It has the same approach as the successful library programme *Art of Reading*.

Elaborated for every target group, subject, theme and partners, it shows the wide variety of partners ith which libraries' cooperate in order to achieve better literacy.

Under this programme new products have been developed to support learning basic skills, mainly with the help of computer, webbased programmes, such as Klik &Tik, Read &Write.

In the Netherlands, the notion of Media Wisdom was defined in 2005. It is linked to the paradigm shift produced by the Internet. New Media have an impact on people's lives, so librarians have to be trained to become Media coach.

In the Netherlands, as I other countries, government policy is focused on making all public services only digitally available. Many citizens are not ready for that. Municipalities can start a training programme called 'Digisterker' (Stronger in digital skills), and requests libraries to perform these training courses. Nevertheless, in Europe libraries should raise awareness, that by e-policies, governments are creating new gaps in literacy, and new illiterates.

Getting back to the National Literacy program "Literacy in the Netherlands," cooperation in a chain of educational and welfare institutes is thought of the key to success for improving literacy. Partners may be private language schools, interested companies and the municipality. A nice example of 'forerunner' libraries' in the 2012 program is the cooperation with the Social workforce. Libraries cooperate with the social work places and offer training at this work place or in the public library with courses that raise skills and support the return to society. In 2013 the Netherlands Institute for Public Libraries, SIOB[1] proceeds with monitoring programs of the activities in the public libraries related to lifelong learning, literacy and information literacy. Also training in different regions for the librarians is on the agenda. From 2014 onwards there will be more policy information and research available.

The success of programming and cooperation has been proved, still there is the never ending challenge of improving facilities, courses and material. A regular and broad development of a special book supply is likewise a constant necessity.

All materials, including toolkits for libraries have now been brought together in one portal site called library and basic skills (www.bibliotheekenbasisvaardigheden.nl) and includes also films, video's in order to work with partner for the aims of helping people in language skills and in digital skills. http://taalvaardig.bibliotheek.nl/toolkit

Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC, OECD study 2013

The OECD report (http://skills.oecd.org/skillsoutlook.html) shows that for instance in the Netherlands, although the overall level of literacy remains very good, there are more and more high literate people, and more and more low literate people. And the gap between the high literate people and the low literate people is widening. This means different actions should be undertaken.

☐ In the Netherlands, the mean proficiency score of 16-65 year-olds in literacy is significantly above the average of the OECD countries participating in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). In numeracy, the mean proficiency score is also significantly above the average.

☐ In the Netherlands, the younger adult population (16-24 year-olds) scores significantly above the average in literacy of the OECD countries participating in the Survey. In numeracy, they score significantly above the average. In both domains, younger adults score higher than their older counterparts (55-65 year-olds).

☐ In the Netherlands, 6.7% of the adult population (16-65 year-olds) report no prior experience with computers or lack very basic computer skills. In contrast, 42% of the adult population score at the highest levels in problem solving in technology-rich environments, a proportion significantly above the average of the OECD countries participating in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC).

☐ In most participating countries, a significant minority have a very low level proficiency in literacy and numeracy. This is also true for the Netherlands, where 11.7% of the adults score at the lowest levels in literacy and 13.2% in numeracy.

Additionally the copyright issues that do not seem directly linked to Literacy are in fact related. Because the access to e-content through libraries is impeded because of traditional copyright regulations and this affects the right of access to information as guaranteed by library services.

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[1] Based on the pioneering work by Lourina K. de Voogd, advisor at Netherlands Institute for Public Libraries (SIOB) and until 2010 working at the policy department of the Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB). She was in charge of lifelong learning and the multicultural library services and did research at the University of Utrecht and Leiden University.

Concrete programmes at local level in Milan (Italy) and in Belgrade (Serbia) by Aldo Pirola (see powerpoint).

According to recently-updated Italian legislation, from 2013 on students of state-run schools of any levels must be enrolled on line. Quite a large number of families have no access to computers at all or, in some cases, the access is extremely limited. In the case of immigrant families with small knowledge of Italian, enrollment could become a very serious problem. Therefore the public library System of the Municipality of Milan has decided to fill the gap by giving access to computer- illiterate families to the computer stations available in public libraries.

This project involved 15 libraries out of 24 with the exception of the smallest ones. Also the libraries in which the location of computer stations cannot guarantee the necessary privacy had to be excluded. On this occasion libraries have worked as centers for information literacy, not just places where services were delivered to passively acting users. Actually each library scheduled meetings throughout February 2013, in the morning and in the afternoon, to assist families to fill the on-line enrollment application.

Users learned to register in the portal, and then to continue from one module to the other. This support activity was carried out with the help of twenty volunteers, competent in computer science, employed by the special office of the Municipality of Milan responsible to deal with the support of volunteers. Prior to the official start of the programme, a meeting was held in the main library. All librarians of the libraries involved met the volunteers to explain the meaning of the initiative, the methods, the procedures as well as their tasks. A short guide book with the necessary instructions was produced and distributed in order to give further information.

Communication has been given a lot of importance too. Press releases appeared in newspapers, while posters and folders were sent to all the libraries in Milan with a list of all the libraries involved. Unfortunately the time available to organize the support activity was rather short. Nevertheless 40 families availed themselves of the help of volunteers in the libraries, mostly immigrant families with obvious linguistic problems as well as serious difficulties to understand how to use computers and follow the indications to fill the modules correctly. In this way the first step towards computer information literacy has been taken through public libraries and it is reasonable to assume that it might prove a good start to continue on the way to higher and better level.

The Serbian project was about *Strengthening Citizen's Financial Literacy* (i.e. Numeracy). The project was to give people basic knowledge of how to run your family and day-to day budget.
The website is http://novcici.rs/ (see powerpoint).