

# EBLIDA – promoting libraries and EBLIDA Literacies – promoting culture and information society in Europe

***The European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) is an independent umbrella association of library, information and documentation associations and institutions in Europe. EBLIDA is active in issues related to Culture and the Information Society and as embracing cultural diversity is at the heart of the European Union so libraries play an important role in nurturing and promoting access to all parts of European culture.***

The aim of the EBLIDA Literacies group is to maintain a good general awareness of European cultural and information society issues, including policies relating to skills development and citizen participation, and promote the added value that libraries can bring to these programmes. The group was named EBLIDA literacies to better reflect the social equality concerns within the EU agenda including its Digital Single Market programme.

Literacy issues provide a number of challenges for libraries :

- Literacy entails a wide variety of concepts;
- Expectations of library patrons have changed;
- Planning of new library buildings needs to adapt to the times;
- Development of technologies and pedagogical methods is necessary;
- Staff training needs to adapt to users' expectations.

However, there are many possibilities for libraries to enhance the variety of literacy skills of their patrons. Over the last decade, the university libraries have strongly developed their information literacy-training programs. A similar framework for public libraries is.

To conclude, one underlying challenge for librarians will be their ability to adapt to changes and respond in a timely way to such challenges.

## 1. Aims and goals of the EBLIDA Literacies group

The European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) is an independent umbrella association of library, information and documentation associations and institutions in Europe. It was founded in 1992 to promote and defend the interests of libraries and archives and information associations at the European level. EBLIDA follows proposals for legislative change and policy development within the European Union and other European and international bodies (such as the Council of Europe, the World Intellectual Property Organisation) that can affect library missions and activities. EBLIDA also provides support to the national lobbying actions of its member associations.

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Initially called the Expert Group on Culture and the Information Society (EGCIS), the group was renamed EBLIDA literacies to better reflect the social equality concerns within the EU agenda including its Digital Single Market programme. Members of the group are appointed by the EBLIDA Executive Committee.

The aim of the EBLIDA Literacies group is to maintain a good general awareness of European cultural and information society issues, including policies relating to skills development and citizen participation, and promote the added value that libraries can bring to these programmes. The group also disseminates relevant information on these issues to EBLIDA members (libraries and national associations). The group can also make proposals and formulate position statements for endorsement by the Executive Committee to advocate the role of libraries in promoting all types of literacy – basic, media, information and digital literacy – and articulate their importance to cultural enrichment and citizen engagement.

The group cooperates with other organizations and institutions for these purposes by, for example, sharing information and best practice. It explores and analyses the European agenda on culture and the information society (including Information Literacy and Media Literacy) and responds to public consultations whenever relevant.

One example of EBLIDA Literacies work is the EBLIDA statement on Libraries and literacy in 2015. The statement highlighted that promoting literacy is important to European libraries. It fits well into the social inclusion agenda that is a key motivator for many library services. Information literacy can also be seen as a broader set of literacies that libraries are keen to facilitate including digital literacy and critical literacy, all important living skills of the modern world.

In 2016 the Cult Committee of the European parliament published a research report called Research for cult committee – promoting media and information literacy in libraries. The report describes how librarians and public libraries are active in promoting information literacy and media literacy. After a brief historical sketch, this document describes how public libraries assist patrons and educational institutions in enhancing knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to critically engage with media and information. It sketches international organizations' endeavours to put media and information literacy (MIL) on the policy agenda, describes what is (not yet) known about the effectiveness of MIL programs, and offers recommendations for EU and public library policy.

These kind of reports are a good way of influencing the European Union. Besides the EU it is also important to work closely with the Council of Europe that offer opportunities to address the issue of literacy in a broad sense. For instance, EBLIDA was invited to a panel discussion on Critical Internet Literacy at the EURODIG 2017 in Tallinn, Estonia, an open forum for discussion bringing together policy-makers, civil society organisations and committed citizens, and provide opportunities to influence the policy debate.

## 2. Challenges for libraries

Literacy issues provide a number of challenges for libraries.

Firstly, literacy entails a wide variety of concepts such as computer literacy, digital literacy, visual literacy, critical literacy, information literacy or media literacy, all of which overlap. In the ever-growing debate on these new literacy skills, one common theme emerges: the need for these skills to include the use of the latest technologies.

Secondly, *the expectations of library patrons* have changed. The term "Generation Z" (born after 1993) is widely used to describe those who have used the internet their whole lives. Other terms are used in the literature such as the Millennials, Digital Natives and Google generation (Rowlands et al., 2008). Although those concepts are subjective and debatable, it is a fact that library professionals need to take into account the services the new generations expect from libraries.

Thirdly, the planning of new library *buildings* needs to adapt to the times. Historically library buildings have been built primarily to store library collections and to accommodate study and research (Leighton 2001). As we just noted, with new skills and new expectations from users, innovative library premises also need to be available for customers. The new Danish model for the public library sets an objective divided into four goals: experience, involvement, empowerment and innovation. Each goal requires a different type of space that does not need to be a concrete space but an incentivising space: for learning, for inspiration and for meeting. For instance, the learning space should be the place where you can explore the world and find informal learning activities, e-learning, lectures and presentations. (Jochumsen, Hvenegaard Rasmussen & Skot-Hansen 2012, p. 590).

The future holds many challenges for literacies due to the development of *technologies and pedagogical methods*. More information is often available as images, videos or movies, and not only as text. All of this requires specific competences from library staff, with a special focus on e-learning. A better understanding of patrons' needs and of the specific requirements of adult education are key for modern public libraries. This means that progress on education activities for patrons cannot be separated from the development needs of staff who will require new pedagogical and ICT skills.

## 3. Future: Possibilities and opportunities for libraries

### Public libraries in Europe

There are many possibilities for libraries to enhance the variety of literacy skills of their patrons especially since the strength of libraries and librarians is the ability to respond and adapt to changes and new technologies.

Most libraries provide appropriate services in relation to Information literacy and contribute to the enhancement of basic skills and lifelong learning abilities for their customers. While public libraries are incorporating new technologies and providing new devices for their customers, there is better journal coverage of the role of academic libraries in supporting information literacy than public libraries.

An article from Vassilakaki & Moniarou-Papaconstantinou of 2015 identified six roles Academic librarians have adopted over the last decade: teachers, technology specialists, embedded librarians, information consultants, knowledge managers and subject librarians. The librarians' involvement in the learning and research process were highlighted in all role categories identified with a strong focus on a the specific role in teaching information literacy.

Over the last decade, the university libraries have strongly developed their information literacy-training programs. In many cases these models are based both on a national recommendation of the university libraries in the IL-teaching and on a recommendation from a professional association, such as the Association of College and Research Libraries (USA) that has approved in 2015: "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education". (ACRL 2015). A similar framework, the "Seven Pillars of Information Literacy" was developed by SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

These frameworks have been developed for academic libraries and academic students and don't apply per se to public libraries and their customer. A similar framework for public libraries is desirable since media and information literacy instructions are virtually in all libraries. In the UK a start was made in both Scotland and Wales which both developed National Information Literacy Frameworks bringing together all types of libraries, although recent funding problems may have limited their impact. There is still a long way to go to develop literacy skills across to whole library sector in Europe.

## CONCLUSION

Providing evidence-based data is a must when it comes to convince policy-makers and influence the policy debate not only at national level, but at European level as well. With this in mind, EBLIDA and the Latvian Library Association undertook a survey in 2016, to look at non-formal and informal learning activities in Europe's public libraries. The survey found that over 80 % of libraries provide either non-formal or informal learning opportunities with digital literacy topping the categories of provision for a 24 million people in Europe. These are figures that policy-makers can't ignore.

While it is true that pupils and student need to develop information literacy (IL) skills in schools in order to be skilled at work, for lifelong learning and digital citizenship, the above survey showed that it does not only take place in schools.

Libraries throughout Europe are spending large amounts of money to develop the digital collections to the benefit of their patrons who can now access a larger amount of content through databases and collections. However, there are still legal and financial impediments that, as a collateral effect, might damage the promotion of literacy. Indeed, although accessible digital content has risen in number, there are still restrictions coming from outdated copyright rules that need to be redressed, whereas costs for online content (or databases) are subject to licences where terms and conditions as well as pricing are not subject to negotiation.

In addition to these impediments, another key example of how libraries might help in developing literacy skills for all is the EBLIDA response to the Public consultation on fake news and online disinformation prepared by the EBLIDA literacies group. In pointing out the pitfalls the Commission's approach contains, and the lack of scientific evidence supporting this approach, our response focuses on how libraries and their staff across Europe can become part of an effective riposte to misinformation..

When the future holds so many challenges for libraries and librarians due to a lot of external factors, including the fast development of technologies and pedagogical methods, a better answer to these challenges can only be achieved through co-operation with schools and teachers and other civil society organisations. One underlying challenge for librarians will be their ability to adapt to these changes and respond in a timely way to such challenges.

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