EBLIDA CONFERENCE AND EBLIDA-NAPLE-PL2030 JOINT REPORT (ATHENS, 15-16 JUNE 2022)

1. INTRODUCTION

Few spectacles in the world can be compared with the view of the sunset from Mount Lycabettus in Athens. Participants in the EBLIDA Council and Conference in Athens (15-16 June) are taking back home this memory, and many more - exciting and fruitful conversations, the pleasure to meet again after two years of online meetings. In consistence with the title - "Library commitments towards a sustainable, democratic and equitable society" - general reflections about sustainable development were endowed with proposals of actions and projects in public and university libraries and the ways they could be financed. The concept of libraries as modern agoras was modulated in the draft Council of Europe / EBLIDA Guidelines on library legislation and policy in Europe. And how can a society be equal, when digital literacy is low and not attained through a sound and effective e-lending policy?

With well over 100 attendants from more than 20 countries, this conference was among the most successful in EBLIDA history. This was due to the clear European approach of speakers and chairs, but also to a series of workshops and table talks which attracted the interest of all participants and raised animated discussions. The presence of NAPLE and PL2030 representatives was instrumental in enhancing discussions; input was coming from various and interesting perspectives – lighthouse libraries and local management agencies. And we can reasonably expect that library advocacy, as it was discussed and promoted within the conference, will generate funding for libraries at local level on a variety of priorities.

It is quite clear that sustainable development is rapidly shaping library administration and policy and new forms of governance and financial rules are coming to light through the diversification of library incomes. This is

happening in spite of the war in Ukraine and the fact that the barbaric attack of the Russian Federation has turned back the clocks of the 2030 agenda on sustainable development.

During the conference, workshops were an important source of inspiration and proposals and EBLIDA is already providing follow-ups to the activities proposed during the workshops - for instance, that on Ukraine. Ukraine is too important an issue to be neglected and the momentum EBLIDA and its partners created has to continue and even go further.

Following endorsement during the EBLIDA Annual Council meeting, EBLIDA is now embarking upon a new season of opportunities generated from the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. With this new plan a new phase is being opened in the history of EBLIDA, further expanding its horizon as networking hub for all library organisations in Europe striving towards a sustainable, democratic and equitable society.

2. SESSION 1: "LIBRARY COMMITMENT TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT"

Professor Despina Anagnostopoulou and Anastasia Psallida, University of Macedonia in Greece, provided the state of the art of the 2030 agenda on sustainable development, with an emphasis on SDGs 4 and 16, also focussing on the targets and indicators reported in European Union reports. The progress of the sustainable development discourse in the EU is flagrant in spite of adverse events caused by the war.

Niki Dandolou, Special Secretary for European Social Funds Programmes at Ministry of Development and Investments in Greece, informed participants on current developments of the European Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 with a focus on European Social Funds. The partnership agreement between Greece and the European Commission was signed early 2022; Structural Funds may represent a rich window of opportunity for Greek libraries.

Rauha Maarno, Director of customer relations, Accessibility Library Celia, Finland showed how both the political context and urban regeneration may make the difference in library development. She also provided some concrete and critical insights on how traditional library development sometimes conflicts with SDGs.

Three videos provided concrete examples of SDGs implemented in libraries through projects funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 (Veronica Ceruti, Director library system, city of Bologna, Italy, **Guillaume Gast**, Head Médiathèque Nord, Strasbourg, France, and **Spaska Tarandova**, Director Global Libraries Foundation, Bulgaria). After these presentations, participants gathered in three workshops with success stories to be shared. In the case of workshop 1, "Sustainable development and public libraries", light was shed on the many projects described by the EBLIDA 2nd European report on sustainable development and libraries. The success stories of workshop n.2, "Sustainable development and university libraries", and workshop n. 3, "Sustainable development and fundraising", were, respectively, those of the Masaryk University Library and of the Italian Rete delle Reti, in collaboration with AIB.

In general, participants suggested a role for EBLIDA to help libraries in their advocacy with governmental representatives on behalf of users. A forum for citizen discussion / citizen-driven design of library pilots and programmes connected to SDGs is much needed and EBLIDA should support library staff in communicating the outcome of the projects they coordinate to policy-makers and government representatives.

EBLIDA should also support public and university libraries with information about possible funding channels for SDG projects in libraries. Awareness should be raised on sustainable development (once, a topic which was not seen as directly relevant for library work), has now turned into its opposite thanks to the guides, vademecum and other communication tools EBLIDA published. Librarians do a lot of SDG work in their everyday routine, without realising the connection.

3. CONFERENCE SESSION 2: "LIBRARY COMMITMENT TOWARDS DEMOCRACY"

In 2000, the Council of Europe, in collaboration with EBLIDA, drafted the Council of Europe / EBLIDA Guidelines on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe, which proved to be a frame of reference for individual libraries working in often challenging local situations, as well as for regional and municipal administrators willing to restructure local library systems.

Zélia Parreira introduced the draft Council of Europe / EBLIDA Guidelines on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe and their five headlines:

  I.   Freedom of expression, free access to information and democratic participation;
  II.   Libraries within the framework of the European agenda on sustainable development;
  III. Global and local threats and library operations;
  IV.   Digital transformation and the promotion of a sustainable, reliable and inclusive library ecosystem;
  V.   Copyright and the protection of library heritage.

Barbara Schleihagen, Director of the German Library Association, clarified what library legislation and library policy mean. The governance of a library system is, or may be, the result of a savvy combination of legislation and policy. She pointed to the importance of the Guidelines as drivers for change in countries where legislation is lacking or new framework policies have to be adopted. **Knut Skansen**, Oslo Municipal Library Director, Norway, introduced the concept of libraries as an "independent meeting place and arena for public discussion and debate" (Norwegian Library Act, 2013). He pointed to the practical application of this law within the Oslo Municipal Library where users are free to set up their own resources through podcast factories and other publishing enterprises. Dragos-Adrian Neagu, Director at Biblioteca Judeteana "Panait Israti" Braila, President Romanian Library Association, described the process of transforming library policy into library legislation, and how this process has provided momentum for the development of the Romanian library system. He also pointed to the development of democracy and the role played by Romanian libraries in facing the flow of Ukrainian refugees. **Kathrin Merkle**, Head of the Culture and Cultural Heritage Division, and **Jovana Poznan**, Project Officer, Culture and Cultural Heritage Division, Council of Europe, expanded upon the status of Council of Europe Guidelines for the Council of Europe and the civil society. They also made an important proposal: to convert the current draft Council of Europe / EBLIDA Guidelines on Library Legislation and Policy in Europe into a Council of Europe Recommendations with appended Guidelines. This would give much more visibility to the Guidelines and also provide room for a larger impact.

4. CONFERENCE SESSION 3: "LIBRARY COMMITMENT TOWARDS EQUAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION"

Andrew Cranfield expanded upon the concept of equal access to information and e-lending. He pointed to the importance of digital literacy as an objective common to all libraries.

Giuseppe Vitiello, Director, EBLIDA, showed how fruitful the interaction between copyright and its economic foundation can be. On the basis of the tables presented in the Overview he demonstrated how e-lending is underdeveloped in libraries; they should use the Overview to advocate for libraries in relation to digital literacy at national and European levels.

Valérie Bouissou, Director, Bibliothèque Municipale Nîmes, France, presented the first EBLIDA Overview on e-lending in Europe in a public library perspective. The report clearly shows that, where aggregators are present, there is a normalising effect on the e-lending market with a reduction of e-lending business models and, to a certain extent, less chaotic practices.

Mikkel Christoffersen, Chief Consultant, The Digital Public Library, Denmark, presented the successful model of e-lending in Danish libraries based on cooperation between librarians and publishers. He also stated that practices should be carefully analysed in a European context, as the British market presents characteristics that cannot be easily compared to e-lending features in other European countries.

Erna Winters, Managing Director ABC, Huis, The Netherlands, provided additional data on the role of aggregators and the positive role the Royal Library of Netherlands is playing in negotiations with publishers.

5. PROGRESS REPORT: EBLIDA-NAPLE-PL2030 JOINT ACTION ON UKRAINE

On 24th February, EBLIDA-NAPLE-PL2030 released a statement condemning the barbaric attack of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Immediately afterwards the website "Libraries for Refugees" (https://lib4refugees.splet.arnes.si/) was created, where library activities for Ukrainian displaced people are listed.

During the workshop held at the EBLIDA-NAPLE-PL2030 joint event on 16th June, many librarians reported about the difficulty experienced in receiving Ukrainian books as roads bordering Ukraine are kept clear for military purposes. Not only don't they receive the books they have ordered, but they cannot offer interlibrary loan activities as libraries are not adequately supplied. In some cases, libraries are competing with each other to acquire books.

Some participants wondered whether their Ukrainian books are printed out of Ukraine, also on print-on-demand basis (and some library utilities have even offered to do so). Others asked to what extent Ukrainian books in digital form (for instance, for students willing to take their exams online) can circulate through e-lending aggregators. Others participants suggested recruiting Ukrainian personnel, whose digital competencies are high, to improve further online distribution of Ukrainian books.

EBLIDA raised the issue with the Federation of European Publishers. In FEP's answer, it is recommended "*that you contact Ukrainian publishers who might print on demand". Moreover, "For online offers, […] the promoters of YAKABOO – інтернет-магазин книг, подарунків та дитячих товарів. Купити книги в магазині за найкращими цінами в Україні are allowing Ukrainians in exile to access ebooks. […] Different sites providing access to Ukrainian literature is knigi.ua or book-ye.com.ua http://www.ukrlib.com.ua/books/"*.

This is not the only activity EBLIDA developed as a follow up to the Workshop on Ukraine. EBLIDA, NAPLE and PL2030 brought the Ukrainian issue to the attention of the European Commission, in particular within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. The European Commission answered that "*libraries and associations of libraries and librarians are eligible as coordinators and partners in several Erasmus+ actions."* In response to the situation in Ukraine, the Commission decided that *"beneficiary institutions of ongoing Erasmus+ projects in areas such as inclusion, diversity and citizenship are welcome to reallocate part of their existing project funds to activities supporting the education and training challenges related to the refugee crisis."* (The list of the National Agencies and their contact details is available here: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/national-agencies).

The EC also encourages *"to mobilise networks and apply under the upcoming Erasmus+ calls for proposals with projects supporting Ukrainian refugees in an educational context."*

We are currently also looking into solutions to support the Ukrainian cultural and the creative sectors in the short, medium, and long term, both through Creative Europe and through coordination with other Commission services and EU Institutions.

6. PL2030 TABLE TALK « LIBRARY ADVOCACY IN EUROPE » FACILITATED BY ILONA KISH

Ilona Kish, director of PL2030, facilitated a lively and interactive session around advocacy for libraries in Europe involving a group of 47 participants. Ilona gave a short input speech on the meaning and objectives of advocacy in a library context.

The participants were then invited to brainstorm bilaterally with the person sitting next to them around the most important characteristics of a successful advocacy activist and to feed their thoughts back to the group. The results featured a broad range of characteristics that were then discussed together in relation to a list of "ten advocacy tips for activists" including: Be early, Be reliable, Be honest, Be understanding, Be nice, Be thorough, Be brief, Be consistent, Be personal and Be a bridge builder! Ilona underlined that successful advocacy is about relationships and long-term outcomes.

Referring to many practical examples from the library context, Ilona showed that a commitment to collective outcomes should be at the basis of any good advocacy strategy. Organisations should align on goals and approaches, share actions and intelligence, develop common messaging and finally celebrating successes together. The participants were invited to share their individual experiences with the group.

Concluding the session, Ilona presented the upcoming advocacy campaign of PL2030, NAPLE and EBLIDA under the current Czech presidency of the EU. Together, the three organisations are lobbying for an action dedicated to libraries in the new EU work plan for culture for 2023 – 2026 that will be adopted by the national ministers of culture in November this year. PL2030, NAPLE and EBLIDA will co-ordinate and agree on their main messages and goals - a great opportunity to collaborate and share!

7. EBLIDA TABLE TALK « E-LENDING IN EUROPE » FACILITATED BY GIUSEPPE VITIELLO

If the notion of e--lending is manifest - in EBLIDA terms: "making a digital object available for use for a limited period of time and not for direct or indirect economic or commercial advantage"[1] – its scope is not obvious at all. E-lending's taxonomy – i.e. the categories of material covered by e-lending - must be defined.

People often talk about "e-books" - a text document converted into or published in a digital format. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that "digital audiobooks" – a sound recording of a reading of any literary production that has been converted into or published in a digital audio – may be a popular category of material, sometimes even more attractive to library users than e-books. The very first problem for an e-lending analysis is therefore to define the scope of e-lending and what is e-lending is about.

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[1] EBLIDA. E-publishing and the challenge for libraries. A discussion paper prepared by Harald von Hielmcrone, Rosa Maiello, Toby Bainton and Vincent Bonnet, 12 April 2012, http://www.eblida.org/news/european-libraries-and-the-challenges-of-e-publishing.html

Figures included in the EBLIDA First Overview of e-lending in Europe clearly show that e-lending is either non-existent in European public libraries or is a still budding business. This extremely poor record also proves to be anomalous if compared to the percentage of European digitally literate people over the country population. Whatever the level of digital literacy in a country, it is a fact that e-lending in public libraries does not align to the percentage of digitally literate people, even in countries where the number of e-lending transactions is relatively high compared to the rest of Europe.

The completed Overview (available in 2023) will enlarge the number of countries covered by the Study, will analyse more aspects of e-lending – definitions, the function of aggregators, the influence of Public Lending Right, the respective roles of publishers and libraries – and will determine the elements of future library advocacy.

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