



“Advocacy and Libraries” **Amsterdam, Netherlands, 9 May 2008**

'A library policy for Europe?'

By Gerald Leitner, President EBLIDA

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour for me to welcome you to our conference in cooperation with Vereniging voor Openbare Bibliotheken (VOB) and FOBID.

A warm welcome to all of you

It was a matter of great importance to us that this conference takes place in this venue. This library represents excellence and motivates us all.

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has worked with such dedication organising this conference.

I would also like to thank the two main organisers of this event, our director Andrew Cranfield and Mrs. Marian Koren who has put forward the excellent idea of having a joint conference.

Thank you Andrew!

Thank you Marian!

They have succeeded in organising a programme with excellent international speakers.

“Advocacy for Libraries” is the theme of our conference

And it is a great pleasure for me, on behalf of EBLIDA, to initiate a discussion on the creation of a common library policy in Europe.

Particularly at a time when these libraries are in a period of transition from the traditional model that we have worked with for at least a 100 years, to a very different environment with new forms of access and new media.

To say that this is a new paradigm is not new, but the last two years have seen the European Union renew its focus on the importance of libraries and other cultural institutions.

This is due partly to the recommendations of the i2010 initiative and the launch of the European Digital Library or Europeana as it is now called, which actively promotes digitization activities and access to knowledge and information.

In this recommendation we can, to some extent, see the contours of a library policy for Europe.



However we should be aware that digitization activities are only a small part of what libraries can and should offer the European citizen and end user.

Not least in the public library sector the digitization of collections will be of much less importance than in national and university libraries.

Public libraries are primarily concerned with giving access to materials and it will be the major challenge of the coming years to ensure vibrant library services in a digital age.

We need to be actively involved in issues such as lifelong learning, education, cultural promotion, services to new groups and so forth.

All these issues are of course discussed, to a smaller or larger extent, at the national level, but I also feel that there is a need and an obligation to discuss this at the European level

This is a task for EBLIDA to take an active part in.

This brings me to the question “Do we have a common library policy for Europe?”

From my point of view, the answer is a clear “NO”

What we do have are a couple of initiatives that the libraries are integrated into

Moreover, we have certain recommendations from the EU and a body of regulations concerning the work of libraries but we are far away from having a common policy concerning European libraries.

So far, there is no unified European library system to speak of

It seems that within the EU common policies are only established for matters of economic interest such as legislations governing copyright issues.

If we believe in the idea of a unified Europe, offering equal rights and opportunities for all its citizens, we will have to fight for a common European library policy.

We all know that the European library landscape is heterogeneous. This of course implies that citizens of different countries are not given equal and unrestricted access to information, education and cultural life.

One reason for this situation could be that only two thirds of the twenty-seven EU-countries have legislations governing the library sector¹. In the following I will be referring to Barbara Schleihagen's report about library legislation.

¹ See an excellent paper on “Library legislation in the EU” by Barbara Schleihagen, EBLIDA former Director, at http://www.bibliotheksportal.de/fileadmin/0bibliotheken/Bibliotheken_International/dokumente/Bibliotheksgesetze_in_Europa.pdf

To sum up and to simplify, we can say:

The EU-countries that have excellent library systems have or had national library legislation.

However, excellent library systems do not only necessarily prosper because of governing national legislative regulations.

National policies for libraries clearly indicate the attitude of the politics of the government in power and in how far it is willing to promote and fund the library system.

The burning question is: How can we help to improve the situation?

Eight years ago, in January 2000, the Council of Europe together with EBLIDA published guidelines for a common library policy in Europe.

These guidelines ask the member states of the European Council to formulate library policies suited to the needs of their home countries and / or to replace existing policies regarding the libraries.

Eight years later we see that some of the member states (especially the Scandinavian ones) have indeed improved their library legislations.

But on the other hand no library legislation has been introduced in countries which did not previously have legislation.

The guidelines of the Council of Europe have proved as not very effective.

At this point, I would like to briefly address the varying efficiency of European Council guidelines as opposed to guidelines issued by the European Commission:

- The European Council is an institution that at present comprises 46 member states at this point and is devoted to the promotion of Human Rights, democracy and fundamental freedoms and constitutional legality,
 - European Council Guidelines unfortunately only have the status of recommendations.
- Directives (like for example the Copyright Directive) of the European Commission legally have to be implemented into national legislation in all 27 member states of the EU.

Is a Library Directive issued by the European Commission the answer to the dilemma?

Approximately 80 % of our legislation comes from Brussels. This applies (almost without exception) to laws intended for the advancement of the European Single Market. Unfortunately, the library sector only plays a minor role in the European Market and therefore only attracts marginal interest.

In the near future; I believe it is unlikely that we will see a European Library Law Directive issued by the European Commission.



A possible plan of action

Therefore we should not put our hopes and energy into waiting for the European Commission to take action for a Library Directive.

It makes much more sense to concentrate our lobbying activities on a White Paper that describes the role of the libraries in the European Knowledge Society and recommends and encourages the member states to act on behalf of the libraries.

Our colleagues at NAPLE discussed it.

I suggest that we work on such a Paper together, propose it together and promote it together.

This will take a great deal of dedication and lobbying.

EBLIDA is ready to enter into a cooperation of this kind.

“Advocacy for Libraries” is the topic of our conference

Each and every one of us performing lobbying activities knows that the basis for successful lobbying is accurate and comprehensive information.

If we want to organise successful lobbying measures for libraries on a European level, we will need all relevant information about Europe’s libraries.

Anyone seeking comprehensive information on European libraries – like current statistics of all European countries or the legal position of public libraries in individual European countries will be disappointed to find that such a comprehensive information pool does not exist.

Recent years have brought about several initiatives devoted to collecting information about libraries – PUBLICA, PULMAN and CALIMERA come to mind.

These projects were successful in the short run but whenever they came to an end the collected data were never updated and/or even taken off the web.

This situation is absurd!

Libraries claim to provide free access to any kind of information to all citizens, but at the same time we are not able to provide all relevant information about Europe’s libraries to all stakeholders in an easily accessible form.

From my point of view this is a horrible mistake!

Therefore, to provide relevant and up to date information about European library issues the EBLIDA executive committee has decided to establish a Knowledge and Information Centre to collect, mediate and disseminate information about the library, information and documentation sector in Europe.



Aims of the KIC:

- bring together information (political, cultural, professional etc) which will be a source of information for all stakeholders (government, ministries, local authorities and library professionals) in an edited/monitored environment.
- should be a tool to strengthen the communication, discussion and dialogue among the library associations of Europe, where interests and strategies of common interest can be discussed.
- will act as a networking facility bringing experts within defined fields together and increase the commitment of members to the European library agenda.
- should also incorporate country editors/contacts from each EU country (+Norway, Switzerland and Iceland) to contribute with edited country reports on the five areas.
- should provide a library “map of Europe” detailing e.g., issues of legislation, funding of PLR schemes, statistical data etc.

The findings of the five EBLIDA Expert Groups on

- information law
- digitization and online access
- lifelong learning and education
- culture and information society
- professional education

will lay the foundation for this enterprise.

EBLIDA invites everyone interested in this major project cordially to contribute.

I hope that in cooperation with our partners we can formulate a common vision and arrive at a library policy for Europe for the benefit of both institutions and users.

If we want a unified Europe we will need to think about establishing a common European library policy in order to ensure equal and unrestricted access to information, education and culture for all European citizens.

An ambitious common European library policy will need the best ideas coming from the best minds.

This is why I have high expectations that this conference, our well-established speakers and the coming discussions will be an important and memorable step in the right direction.

On this note I wish all of us an inspiring and successful day.

Thank you for coming!

Gerald Leitner, EBLIDA President

