



Libraries as partners to promote books and reading in Europe

Two events were selected under the Campaign 'Reading for Pleasure' to promote cooperation with and between libraries. The first event took place on 28 January 1994 during the National Congress of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists and was organized by the Associação Portuguesa de Bibliotecários, Arquivistas e Documentalistas (BAD). A European Forum of librarians debated with the audience the following topics: promotion of reading in less favoured communities, possible cooperation among European regions facing the same problems, lending of books to enhance reading in relation to new EC copyright issues, the application of new information technologies to facilitate cooperation and the role of public libraries in fostering adult independent education.

The second event entitled 'Through books discover Europe...and each other' was organized by the Library Association of the UK in collaboration with the Federation of Local Authority Chief Librarians (FOLACL) and EBLIDA and took place on 21-22 March 1994 during the London International Bookfair. On the first day the invited speakers, the audience and representatives of eleven library associations (except Luxembourg) explored the possibilities of the improvement of access to European adult fiction. The 'SEALS project' (SElection, Acquisition and Loans System) in the UK and a similar project of '100 German Titles' formed the basis for discussion and for exploring further European cooperation. The next day, the representatives of the library associations discussed in detail possible ways of developing the 'SEALS project'. The promotion of books and reading and the problems which need to be confronted in its regard were addressed as well. The participants of this European Forum were selected by EBLIDA.

The library community welcomed the initiative of the Ministers of Culture to launch the Campaign 'Reading for Pleasure' and appreciated the European Commission's constructive work and participation in the events. The discussions at the meetings were fruitful and recommended that the following statement be made in promoting books and reading.

General recommendations

1. taking into account the principle of subsidiarity, the library community welcomes the recognition of culture, since the Maastricht Summit, as a specific area of Community action.
2. Community action in the cultural field should be aiming at the following objectives: to combat illiteracy, to stimulate reading, to preserve and conserve the printed word and in general to improve cultural cooperation between Member States and with other European countries.
3. The European cultural environment will remain underdeveloped if opportunities to allow participation are not given to each of the national and regional cultures. The need to encourage active participation in EU programmes was emphasised.

Recommendations to improve cultural access

1. Foreign literature in the original language and in translated form should be available in public libraries to demonstrate the diversity of the cultures in Europe, to promote language learning and to preserve and foster the lesser used languages. The SEALS

project and the 100 German Titles project are examples of good working projects which could serve as a starting point for a broader European cooperation and the exchange of literature in non native languages.

2. A specific programme for library networking and cultural events should be initiated along the lines of the [Kaleidoscope Scheme](#), which would include special conditions to encourage through the European library infrastructure.

Recommendations to encourage economic access to books

1. The necessity for reasonable fixed book prices within linguistic areas and an exemption of VAT on books, magazines and newspapers must be recognised by the EU.
2. The introduction of the lowest possible postage rates for books should be provided for without delay. This would the cost reduce of interlending of materials and of purchase of specialised materials for public libraries.
3. To initiate in the field of copyright, legislation which should encourage good relations between libraries and rights owners. The introduction of exclusive rights for activities of cultural organizations is considered to be counter productive.

Recommendations to improve technical access to books

1. To develop a browsing and selection mechanism for collections in each European language.
2. To create a specific programme directed at libraries of less favoured regions, without excluding them from any other programmes in the field of science and technology launched and managed by other DG's.
3. The urgent need for a decision to standardize good paper quality, thus reducing the production of acid paper which is now predominant. The costs benefits of EU support to the preservation of European cultural heritage must be recognised.
4. Strong support for measures promoting the use of permanent paper and text and image digitalization at European level is necessary to ensure the success of such measures.
5. Community programmes to be launched should consider different stages of development that exist among countries and promote ways to prevent the widening of disparities between such stages of development.
6. To urge for a stronger cooperation between DG X and all remaining structures (mainly DG XIII) that are linked directly or indirectly with library activities in the European Commission and to ensure communications with the library community in Europe.
7. The promotion of books and reading by libraries will be enhanced by improving the physical, social, cultural, economic and technical accessibility to books. The specific needs of people with disabilities and minority groups must be recognised.

Recommendations in respect of physical accessibility to books

1. The necessity of a good public library infrastructure by branch libraries and mobile libraries, with a view to putting people in touch with books, especially in areas where library facilities are non-existent or inadequate, in rural or isolated areas and in areas with low reading levels. The nature of the stock should be relevant to the social and cultural profile of the areas concerned.
2. To encourage and extend the existing systems of inter-library loans and document delivery within the Member States and with third countries.

3. A wide selection of books and non-book materials (e.g. talking books, multi media and videos) should be readily available to all EU citizens through the assistance of public libraries in every possible environment: at school, at work, at home, in the hospital, in the supermarket, etc.
4. The importance of the use of television and other media in the promotion of books and reading should not be neglected and underestimated.
5. The urgent need for preferential treatment to be given through the Regional Fund to grant aid to projects for the construction and facilities of public libraries in the least-developed regions of Europe where such facilities are poor.

Recommendations to promote social accessibility of books

1. To combat illiteracy, the promotion of reading should start with children. It is essential to start as early as possible. Story telling, childrens' book promotions and festivals are excellent examples for promotion. Cooperation between parents, school and public library is necessary for its success. The European Theatre Reading Day and the Hans Christian Andersen Day are good examples of multidisciplinary cooperation in a Euro-pean setting. Such programmes should continue and require EU support.
2. To promote reading among the most disadvantaged people in society an Easy-to-Read database should be set up to monitor and encourage the production of appropriate reading and audio-visual materials accessible to persons with reading difficulties. This database should be made available in all Member States as appropriate.

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