

NAPLE / EBLIDA JOINT CONFERENCE 2010

ABOLISH BARRIERS : THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN AN EVOLVING EUROPE

10:30 – 10:40 María Antonia Carrato

Good morning to everyone. On behalf of NAPLE Forum I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Library of the Finish Parliament, the City Council, the Helsinki City Libraries, the Finnish Library Association and the Finnish Ministry of Education, specially to Barbro for offering again to host our 7th NAPLE Forum conference and this hjoint EBLIDA/NAPLE Conference. In 2006 we could saw the excellent organization of the meeting held in Helsinki and the Finnish professionals and politicians' sensibility supporting initiatives of this moment.

Just then the Project of a White paper on public libraries in Europe was for the first time presented and keep on this objective, which is crucial for the important role of that the public library has to play in European politics. On they way, we have established alliances and started a close collaboration with EBLIDA, facts that will reinforce the success possibilities in this long-term task on which we have all embarked. The joint celebration of the annual meetings and councils of both organisations since last year have had the Declaration of Vienna as a result and the will to join forces to get our objectives.

The preparation of this joint meeting is the story of the work done during the last months by both organisations boards and committees. We have been in contact, and it was at the meeting we held in Copenhagen that we decided on the format, the contents and the input that we wished to obtain from the joint meeting that we celebrate today.

We, as NAPLE Forum members, are convinced of the need for an European policy to support an universal and democratic institution as the public library, to promote its activities and development, as it influences every citizen in the European Union.

In a moment such as nowadays, where we meet adverse circumstances for employment, social inclusion, and the need of generation of creativity and of wealth, Europe reacts, with the aim to improve citizens' lives, with politics and initiatives that try to favour and promote intercultural dialogue and social inclusion, to contribute to close the digital divide, to promote and support lifelong learning and to disseminate and facilitate access to culture to all citizens. This

set of objectives reflects a series of functions that public libraries, as institutions closed to people, have been offering for many years.

Perhaps, we have not been able to communicate well to politicians, or have not used the appropriate channels, the capacity of libraries to adjust to their environment and the needs of citizens, that it's done continuously, in an attempt to be useful to the process of continuing change of the present society. In this manner, libraries can be an important channel of citizens' participation and dissemination of European initiatives and policies.

NAPLE has extended its activities participating in some events with entities that work for inclusion, as CIVIC. The Declaration of Vienna has been disseminated in multiple ways, in professional publications such as ALA's International Leads, and in national and European library meetings and conferences.

The Icelandic volcano ashes, which affected the air traffic, impeded the celebration of the European Public Libraries Directors Meeting in Madrid last 22nd April, within the framework of Spanish Presidency of the European Union. One of the main goals of this meeting was to reflect on key points to take into account when writing the draft white paper. It will be celebrated on the 18th of May and all of you are welcome.

Meanwhile, we have done a consultation to the Technical Commission of Public Libraries of the Council for Library Cooperation that brings together representatives of all administrations with responsibilities in public libraries. I would like to introduce the final achieved conclusions with the purpose of contributing with new elements and ideas that could be reflected in the draft white paper, if it's appropriate:

Among all the freedoms contained in the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, the freedom of thought and the freedom of expression and information are purposefully gathered. Nowadays we've got more information than ever in the history of mankind. And though the possibilities of access are now wider than ever, the actual exercise of both freedoms of thought and access to the information can be limited by several factors. That's why the public authorities should look after the maintenance of systems that ensure the access to all this information and knowledge as the way of ensuring an effective freedom of thought for all the citizens.

The public libraries are neutral institutions that provide access to all kinds of information, ideas and opinions. Through them, citizens are

guaranteed to have access to a wide range of information sources, non limited by any ideological, political or religious censorship or by lobbying from the market.

Furthermore, the services provided by the public libraries are within every single citizen reach, no exceptions made. In fact, we can consider public libraries as the institutions that best exercise the principle of non-discrimination contained in the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union. Moreover, the services available in the public libraries tend to be of free and uncharged use, establishing themselves as public areas for communication, cohabitation and plurality.

Their services are specially designed to meet the needs of all the social groups. They are, thereby, a key element for social inclusion in this multicultural Europe, where people of different places, habits and cultures coexist. In an increasingly globalised society, public libraries offer their services to all kinds of people in a variety of languages. This enables the intercultural dialogue and understanding. The recent approval of IFLA's Multicultural Library Manifesto by the General Conference of UNESCO is one of the consequences derived from the interest that libraries have in these matters.

Clearly, public libraries can cooperate in the elimination of the digital divide, providing access to the information networks and developing information skills. This has to do with other traditional roles in the public libraries: the educational role and the life-long learning.

Information is a very valuable asset; in a well informed democratic society powers are distributed in terms of the knowledge acquired by all the citizens and the possibilities it offers for being creative and generate economic and cultural richness.

In the age of the digital libraries the possibilities for the public libraries to contribute contents focused in the user in all the different languages and matters are immense. By participating in european projects they rise the volume of information accessible by all the citizens.

Public libraries' sphere of influence is mostly local, that's why they are key institutions for the preservation and access of the local culture. They are witnesses of the book publishing over time and at the same time they interfere in the community's cultural life. They favour the social and cultural development of both groups and individuals, the access to the culture and the creativity. European public libraries reflect the cultural diversity at a national, regional and local level of the state members.

But the development of our societies takes us to a scenario where, thanks to the interconnection of local institutions we can accomplish much more valuable results. The wide implementation of public libraries across Europe and the networked technologies enable the creation of the best provided system of public information services in collaboration with school, academic and research libraries.

Finally, I'd like to point out that this effort in library cooperation is open also to other Knowledge institutions that must integrate the information networks that will meet the citizens' information needs, being present where they are now, in the social web and where they will be in the future.

Working together and integrating people in the process, clearly is the key to success in information society.

We are willing to demonstrate the capacity that experts librarians have helping and supporting people in their needs, developing new skills in citizens, offering relevant information and quality resources and creating physical and virtual spaces attractive for communication, knowledge and creativity.

I hope this meeting will be fruitful and as participative as possible as we need your input as a step forward in our common goals.

Thank you very much