

EBLIDA-NAPLE Conference
Abolish Barriers, the role of libraries in an evolving Europe
Helsinki 7.5.2010
Marcus Rantala
Secretary of State
Ministry of Education and Culture

Dear conference participants
Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Ministry of Education and Culture it is my pleasure to welcome such an eminent group of library experts from Europe; members of EBLIDA, the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations, and NAPLE, the national authorities on public libraries in Europe, working together in order to define and abolish barriers in European library and information services and bring visibility to libraries at the European level.

Libraries are generally very much appreciated. However, their swift development in response to present demands should not be taken to happen by itself. The continuous need to accommodate collections and services to new trends and user expectations demands proactive strategic planning and the formulation of larger policy lines.

Finland got its first Library Act in 1929. It stressed the right of citizens to quality library services, whatever their financial standing or place of residence. This same equality thinking marks also the current Act of 1999 and the library strategies and policies of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The Finnish Public Library Policy 2015 – National strategic areas of focus, which has been distributed to you here, defines the direction of the activities in Finnish public libraries and provides a foundation for proposing regulations and government financing.

The objective is to ensure access to information and cultural sources in a networking knowledge, civic and learning society. Library services support intellectual equality and reduce the digital information gap.

The high level of education in the field of library and information services and the ability to react quickly to changes in society are the stepping stones with which Finnish libraries have succeeded in their mission. Lending and visiting figures are extremely high, there were nearly 19 loans and more than 10 visits in the physical libraries per capita in 2009.

Virtual visits on library web sites are nearly as many as the physical library visits.

As the Internet and digital services have become common, libraries are clearly in a position where they have to compete. We do not know yet how fast E-books will conquer the market on the expense of the traditional P-books (paper books).

The way people learn, seek information, read and write, has changed, and will continue to change.

Future success must be earned, states the library policy - libraries answer to future challenges by focusing on expertise and emphasizing quality.

I wish you an interesting and rewarding conference day.