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# UNESCO's 1994 Public Library Manifesto\*

HELLEN NIEGAARD

Hilleroed Public Library, Dinamarca

**P**UBLIC libraries almost all over the world are these years facing the same very difficult problems.

One is the tendency for governments to consider public libraries a matter of minor relevance to the development of society and consequently to withdraw from funding them and from supporting their development.

A second problem is the change in demands for services relating to the following, general conditions. There is more information on more and more subjects than ever before.

Libraries in all parts of the world seem to experience a distinct growth in educational demands. Problems of literacy are more actual than ever — in the developing countries as well as in the developed countries.

Third, new technologies are rapidly changing the possibilities, the means and the tools of the public libraries. New media, new systems and new ways of communication are influencing or will somehow influence local public library services in most regions of the world.

To meet such new demands IFLA's Section for Public Libraries according to IFLA's Medium-Term-programme 1992-1997, was to reexamine the probably most important global document on public libraries: UNESCO's Public Library Manifest, first issued in 1949 and revised in 1972.

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A couple of decades have gone since UNESCO's document was last revised, since then political systems, economic structures and not least technology have changed and thus altered the scene of action of the public library and made a new revision relevant.

As it will not be possible to go through every detail of the new 1994 document in this connection, I shall concentrate on some major themes reflecting the problem areas just mentioned, and finally introduce the process ahead of us, the process of promoting the 1994 Manifesto, however starting with the revision process.

### **Revision 1994, a long process**

The historical background of the Manifesto may be well-known to most colleagues, allow me however to recall the situation of the first edition.

At the UNESCO 2nd General Conference on November 1947 it was decided that the organisation should publish leaflets to promote the understanding of public libraries, and the Libraries Working Party at the conference agreed that one of the leaflets should take form of a declaration, a manifesto stating the aims, and functions of public libraries.

The document stressed the main principles of public librarianship and described the public library under the following headings:

- UNESCO and public libraries;
- The public library: a democratic agency for education;
- What the public library should offer;
- A vital community force;
- The peoples university.

When 1972 was proclaimed — by UNESCO — the International Book Year a number of activities took place all over the world of reading, including an updating of the 1949 version.

Compared to the first manifesto the 1972 version broadened the concept of the public library stating that the library should not only support educational purposes, it should equally promote culture and cultural events. The idea of special services for children and for disadvantaged people were introduced in this text.

Moscow August 1991, reminds us of the IFLA Conference, which took place during the historical events changing the Soviet Union into a number of individual states. However it was also the time, when the Standing

Committee for Public Libraries according to the then new Medium-Term-Programme set up a working group to examine the 1972 version, to suggest changes and finally to put forward a revised version reflecting the changes and current needs.

Though the new revision group itself was limited to three members, Thierry Giappiconi (France), Marie Louise Riesthuis (The Netherlands), and myself (all members or former members of the SC), several professionals from most parts of the world have been involved in the work.

Besides the other SC-members, a number of corresponding members in different parts of the world have contributed to the work, that was discussed halfway at the General Conference 1992 in Delhi. Eventually an international conference was held last August in Portugal, Guimarães, as a pre-conference to the 1993 General Conference in Barcelona in order to have a set of final recommendations before going into the last rounds of formulation.

Subsequently these recommendations were introduced to some 175 participants of the Barcelona Conference at the Open-Session of the Standing Committee.

Since August last the working group has prepared the final 1994 version, assisted by Philip Gill from UK, also a member of the Standing Committee for Public Libraries.

During spring this year the new version has been approved by the Coordinating Board of IFLA's Division III (the division serving the general public) and at the agenda of Professional Board, before being formally handed over by IFLA Head Quarters to UNESCO. It is to be adopted at the November meeting of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Council for the General Information Programme (libraries, archives, information services, etc.). After which it should be translated into as many languages as possible.

### **Information for human development, a public responsibility**

A central message of the revision is a belief in the public library as a vital force in the promotion of basic human rights. The right to know, to freedom of opinion, to seek and receive information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. A right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community as well as to enjoy the arts according to the articles 19, 26 and 27 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

All important aspects of the manifesto having considered, since the very first edition in 1949, the services of the public libraries as one of the keys to promoting sustainable human development *at the local level!*

The first and second paragraph's demonstrate this belief saying that «Freedom, prosperity and the positive development of society and individuals benefit from independent well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities», and mentioning UNESCO's belief in the public library as a vital force in meeting the objectives of the organisation being to serve peace and spiritual progress by working to educate and enrich the minds of men and women.

The revision proved it fundamental to reach the decision makers of all levels, as the library sector as such experience a lack of commitment of politicians and authorities. They are not aware of the role and of the tasks of the public library in the development of society, and they often share an image of the public library being solely a cultural institution fulfilling «entertaining purposes».

The concept of the document has therefore changed as regards «to whom it should be addressed to». As the 1949 text addresses the general public and the 1972 text the institutions, the professionals, this version addresses decision makers, political authorities at national and at local level.

Noting that the public library is not only a matter for the benefit of the individual itself, but also for the benefit of society as such, the document follows the ideas of the United Nations Development Programme stating «That people are real wealth of a nation» to quote UNDP report on Human Development. The report states that «Human development has two sides: the formation of human capabilities — such as improved health, knowledge and skills — and the use people make of their acquired capabilities — for productive purposes or being active in social, political or cultural affairs and for leisure». Highlighting the fact that this «is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth».

Greater access to knowledge as well as a sense of participating in the economic, cultural and political activities of the community is defined to be as important as income, health etc. and the report underlines, that «recent development experience has once again underlined the need for paying close attention to the link between economic growth and human development».

The public library being the local institution to provide access to knowledge, information and culture should therefore be of particular interest to decision makers and political authorities. In the closing paragraph the 1994 manifesto thus directly addresses decision makers of national and of local levels urging them to implement the ideas of the manifesto.

Being a public responsibility the public library should be financed by national and national and local government. There has been a general support for this formulation all through the revision, however the question of charging was less easily decided, it was probably the most controversial issue of the process. A preliminary draft evolved from the first two years discussions actually opened for charging for «specific services, *e. g.* computerized information services». This proposal led to very principal and intense debates at the international pre-conference in Guimarães and was finally rejected.

First of all it was considered a «short sighted» policy to mention fees for computerized services as more and more services will be computerized, and as these service area will be declining in price. But the main reason for finally rejecting the proposal was, that such proposals were irrelevant in a document of «ideal» character. The final formulation therefore states that «The public library shall in principle be free of charge»!

Also, being a public responsibility, the public library services should be developed within the framework of national strategies for information and culture. However, relevant for questions of principal nature, strategies can not stand alone and will not themselves provide efficient and rational library development as such. The 1994 manifesto therefore, as the previous issues, is in favour of specific library legislation. A library act which should clarify, as said in the paragraph: Finance and Legislation, when the national, and when the local authorities are responsible for goals, for running the public library, for their development as well as for funding.

### Concept and principles of the 1994 version

Fundamentally the 1994 manifesto maintains ideas and intentions of the former versions, however, strengthening and simplifying the general concept and adding new priorities relating to current trends of development. As the former versions the 1994 text expresses UNESCO's belief in the public library as being a democratic institution supporting the right to knowledge of all citizens regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality or language.

Equality of access to services should furthermore be assured for all people, who can not for any reason use the regular services and materials, for example people with disabilities, people who are institutionalised or linguist minorities.

The headings of the 1994 version are as follow:

- UNESCO and the Public Library;
- The Public Library in support of Democracy;
- Objectives and Priorities;
- Finance and Legislation;
- Resources and Services;
- Networks and Partners;
- Organisation and Management;
- Professional Intermediaries;
- Implementing the Manifesto.

The 1949 manifesto focussed especially on the role of educational needs. The 1972 broadened the concept and stated that the public library, besides education, should promote unlimited access to universal knowledge, thought and culture and develop into a local cultural institution offering its users relaxation and pleasure. In the new version particular emphasis is attached to the *dual role* of the public library being both the local centre and that of information, a centre providing free and culture at the local level through its collections and through national library networks.

The reason for this change of framework is basically connected to the «right to know» and should be seen in the light of current trends of development of which some were mentioned earlier.

The growing flood of information related to the new technologies and the electronic possibilities themselves. The growth in educational demands on library services due to students' continuously increasing library needs including the demand for lifelong learning. The fight for traditional literacy as «learning to read is essential to be able to access and process information, to create and apply new knowledge, to participate in social processes designed to modify the environment and to create better living conditions at individual, community and national levels» to quote a paper given by Mrs. M. E. Zapata in Guimarães (1993) at the international revision conference, and not the least the fight against the new kind of literacy shaping a two-levelled society of information strong and information.

Following the statements of the United Nations on human development, mentioned before, *library services to children* are considered a major priority.

The new document states that «the ability to read is the key to knowledge and information (whether speaking of traditional or of new materials). It is therefore important, that children should be encouraged to develop the

reading habit from their early childhood, and that the library provides special services to encourage the development of reading skills». Taking the dual role of the public library into account, the library should equally provide opportunities for personal, creative development and in particular stimulate the creativity, intelligence and imagination of children.

### Means and methods of the Public Library

One thing is totally different from the former versions. Books are no longer the main-concern of the public library.

Public library service should include all *appropriate media*. Collections and information should be based on a basis of quality and standards, related to local demands without any kind of censorship.

To the developing as well as to the developed world this was an extremely important step. To the so called developed world but also to other regions of the world this decision is highly relevant in order to catch up with demands from the users, asking for other media than books as more and more information and cultural products are found in form of audio-visuals, online-databases, CD-ROMs, multimedia and other computerized products.

To the developing world it was an equally important decision in order to stress the fact, that communicating knowledge, information and culture in some regions takes place in the form of oral and aural transfer.

In achieving and promoting its objectives of communication knowledge, information and culture public library services should thus make use of both relevant traditional materials as well as modern technology!

To provide its services the local public library can not stand alone. Neither from a financial nor from a rational point of view is this possible, and the 1994 manifesto therefore highly stresses that the *local* public library should be seen as the gateway to a national information and library network. A network built up of cooperating libraries including regional, national research, and special libraries as well as all sort of school libraries promoting interlending library services.

Another way to ensure optimal efficiency is better library management *e. g.* by setting clear goals and priorities and by establishing a well situated and a well organised library building.

Furthermore the role of the librarian as an active intermediary between the individual and information, and thus vital to the provision of an effective service, is introduced.

### Differences between the 1972 and the 1994 versions

Said very short the differences between the last version and the new. What has been left out?

- Books are no longer the main concern of the public library;
- relaxation and pleasure;
- bringing people together of similar interest;
- problems of loneliness, and mental and physical handicaps as problems that might be alleviated in many ways by the public library.

Instead the revision-party has tried to focus upon the main principles of the Manifesto as being:

- to promote the public library as an instrument of democracy development;
- to provide information, knowledge and culture through all appropriate types of media;
- to attest the need for all relevant materials including modern technology;
- to emphasize the universal accessibility;
- to emphasize the public library as the *local* gateway to the world of information;
- to confirm that public libraries should provide collections and services which meet the needs of all users, including potential users;
- to provide special services to encourage the development of reading skills as they are considered the key to knowledge;
- to recognise the needs of cultural diversity, to give special attention to oral and aural transfer of knowledge;
- to promote efficient and professional management and to provide well organised libraries;
- to promote the professional guidance to the services;
- to endorse the concept of library services being free of charge;
- to urge decision makers to encourage and support development of the public libraries and of a national library network.

### Promotion of the 1994 Manifesto

Recognising the importance of promoting the manifesto towards the decision makers and the professional world the international revision con-



ference last summer suggested that the section, IFLA and UNESCO should consider a number of different actions of promotion.

Apart from correct translations into as many languages as possible the conference stated that both traditional and new media be taken into account pointing at that moment at leaflets, posters and articles followed by videos and CD-ROMs. In addition various actions of introduction on national level via National UNESCO-Commissions and Library Associations were considered relevant. Plus presentation at regional and subregional for a such as UNESCO itself and for instance as the European Council for Europe.

Special attention should be given to promotion towards students of Library Schools, universities, etc.

From the spring meeting 1994 in Copenhagen an open workshop included debate of future promotion activities, and it was agreed as suggested by the danish politician and president of the Danish Library Association Mr. Mogens Damm, that the future plan of promotion should involve assistance from a professional company of promotion in order to ensure relevant forms of action towards the different types of decision makers throughout the regions of the world.

Finally a revision should be scheduled to the year 2014 or 2019 at the latest.

At the meeting in Havana (August 1994) a complete plan of promotion will be discussed within the Standing Committee for Public Libraries and afterwards carried out together with IFLA's divisions and sections and UNESCO.

### **One for all and all for one**

One of the questions raised early in the period of revision was the question of the relevance of having one manifesto for the whole world. «Can the public library manifesto, did it ever continue to serve both first and third world?»

The answer to the provocative question, evoked from debates and posed to the participants of the international revision conference in Guimarães, was definitely positive. The mere thought of a two-tier manifesto was turned down from all sides and considered destructive to the future impact of the manifesto.

The 1972 text was considered too western oriented, for example when speaking of «the printed word as being for centuries the accepted medium for communication of knowledge». The 1994 version therefore is trying to reflect a more global approach.

That is also the reason why the 1994 version, for example, does not promote specific types of new technologies, however relevant they might be to libraries. The importance of new technologies are of course included in the manifesto, however expressed in more general terms reflecting the variety of the different circumstances of the public libraries within the developing and the developed world.

«Knowledge transfer is one of the keys to promoting the kind of sustainable human development worldwide on which the future of this planet will depend».

To end this introduction to the 1994 Manifesto I hereby quote the words of UNESCO's Director General, Mr. Frederico Mayor from the opening of the last Council for UNESCO's General Information Programme concerning archives, libraries and information in November 1992, when he introduced the new «Long Term Strategic Orientations» of PGI, as the revision of UNESCO's Public Library Manifesto should be seen within the framework of these Orientations.

Allow me on behalf of the working group to express our hopes for 1994 document: May the 1994 Manifesto be of inspiration to all parts of the world!

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