

The Public Library 2010: and it's role with the Internet

A lecture prepared by John Lake, Chairperson of the Public Libraries Section and Secretary of the Division III Libraries Serving the General Public of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) for the Seminaris de l'Aula Jordi Rubio I Balaguer

Facultat de Biblioteconomia I Documentacio at the Facultat de Biblioteconomia I Documentacio, Barcelona on Wednesday 24 October 2007

Introduction

Dear public library colleagues, students of the Public Libraries course of the Facultat, representatives of the Diputació de Barcelona, Generalitat de Catalunya and the Col·legi de Bibliotecaris-Documentalistes who have contributed to inviting me here for this seminar in the Facultat de Biblioteconomia I Documentacio in Barcelona. I am honoured and privileged to be here to speak to you today on behalf of the Public Libraries Section of the International Federation of Library Associations at this inaugural Seminar de l'Aula Jordi Rubio I Balaguer. I'd like to pay tribute to the forward looking approach of institute lectures of this sort, examining what our libraries could be like in the future.

In fact, envisaging "The Public Library of the Future" was one of the first assignments I was set as a student of Librarianship over 30 years ago and it was interesting for me to reflect on how far my perception of that has come to pass. I think that my crystal ball gazing was guided and inspired by a work of science fiction and a basic training in computer programming and technology because I imagined a library as something that did not exist in just a building with books and audio materials (then LPs and audio cassettes) but where people sat at computer "terminals" and logged in to find the information they required from any where in a building or beyond. This was considered an ill conceived and fanciful concept by my tutor at the time, when the "Internet" had not been heard of by anyone outside of the American military, books and journals were the only real source of information and knowledge and computers were something which occupied an entire floor of many organisation's buildings and threw out kilometres of magnetic tape or punched paper cards to produce a single organisational payroll.

Before I begin the real content of my lecture, I'd like to make it clear that this is not a technical paper on the Internet and information technology, I am going to explore the role the Internet has played and will continue to play as a service tool within the public library and will not be concentrating on the "nuts and bolts" of how this can be achieved through specific software or applications.

In order to do this I am going visit and take apart some significant relevant IFLA documents, including The Public Library Manifesto¹, The IFLA/Unesco Public Library Guidelines for Development² and most critically The IFLA Internet Manifesto³. But before I do that I am going to take a brief look back in time and provide a short introduction to IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) as the organisation I am representing today.

The Internet, the World Wide Web and the whole digitised information environment which is integral to the service, that public libraries now provide in most if not all countries of the world, is a relatively new component to our working environment over the last 15 years. I can recall a library I was manager of in Brighton introducing a public internet facility in 1993, when viewing the Magna Carta, (a seminal historical document in English history) from the British Library website would take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to load up. Even at that relatively early time we recognised that things would have to change dramatically in order for the service to be of use more widely in libraries, in businesses and peoples homes.

So, huge progress has been made in a short period of time and libraries all around the world have embraced the revolution the like of which has not happened since the introduction of the printing press in 15th century Europe (earlier in China and Korea). Public Libraries in the UK were only being established in the early 19th century apart from some notable exceptions. One of these was a library in my own local authority in the City of London. Guildhall Library was, arguably, the first public library in England started in the year 1425 with a collection of books bequeathed by a Lord Mayor of London which were used by a select group of professional lawyers, doctors etc who possessed the privileged ability of being able to read. This collection of books was subsequently sequestered by a nobleman, The Duke of Somerset in 1550 who decided that he needed the books far more than the professional classes of the City and they were never returned nor did the Library re-open until early in the 19th century. If only we could recoup the overdue charges from his modern relatives! So here was a very early example of cultural censorship which we would find an abomination today... but I will return to that theme later.

Public libraries have established vital services for communities based on the printed word and we are now in the business of extending that to the digitised word. Without doing that public libraries would be an anachronism – fact.

Adapting to change is something that library and information workers have been good at – early adopters of library management systems, new technologies from the long playing record, to cassette, CDs and now digitised information. However, all of these materials are but a means to an end – not an end in themselves – by that I mean the role that public libraries play in society should be measured by the impact they have on creating an educated, informed and a well balanced society. These may be self evident truths to you – I hope they are – but we need to remind ourselves of that when we are getting immersed in the technical aspects of providing services in the Internet.

Library buildings are changing too and while I will not concentrate on this, up until now, important aspect of the service, it is significant to note that communities still see libraries as neutral, safe places to be and meet people in and we should remember that fact when we are discussing the design of libraries in the future and the questions of “do we need a library building at all?” are raised by chartered accountants and finance committees.

WHAT IS IFLA?

- IFLA (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users. It is the global voice of the library and information profession.

The Three Pillars of IFLA

- The Society Pillar
focuses on the role and impact of libraries and information services in society and the contextual issues that condition and constrain the environment in which they operate across the world.
 - The Profession
focuses on the issues covered by the long established Core Activities – Action for Development through Libraries Programme ([ALP](#)), IFLA CDNL Alliance for Bibliographic Services – ([ICABS](#)), Preservation and Conservation ([PAC](#)), Universal Marc Format ([UNIMARC](#)) - and the [Sections](#) and [Divisions](#). They lie at the core of our professional practice and help libraries and information services to fulfil their purposes and to shape responses to the needs of clients in a rapidly changing global environment.
 - The Members
Is central to IFLA. It includes the services we offer to members, management of their membership of IFLA, conferences and publications. We must work together to make IFLA more vibrant and attractive and beneficial for members throughout the world
- The Public Libraries Section organises two meetings a year for planning programmes, publications and producing guidelines.
 - The Conference programmes at the IFLA World Library and Information Congress are planned to enable papers to be presented on topical subjects or areas of interest. e.g. In Durban the Section contributed to a day long programme on the topic of how public libraries contribute to *Social Inclusion* in society and in South Korea last year a programme on the Digitisation of Audio Visual Materials
 - Internationally agreed guidelines are an important part of the work which IFLA contributes to the professions. The Public Libraries Section

has produced the Public Library Guidelines for Development (2001) and The IFLA/Unesco Public Library Manifesto (1994) and it contributes comments on guidelines produced by other Sections in IFLA e.g. The Multicultural Manifesto⁴ and The Guidelines for Babies and Young Children⁵.

- IFLA has a strong publications programme and the Section has produced a variety of papers, resources lists and positional reports –, Public Libraries, Archives and Museums Report (2008), Meeting User Needs⁶, The Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning⁷.
- IFLA is a changing organisation and in 2005 the previous Section on Mobile Libraries was integrated into the Public Libraries Section. Much wider changes are now planned in the structure of the Sections and Divisions of IFLA to be implemented in 2009.
- The Section plays an active role in assisting the development of public libraries and supporting their growth by being an information resource and acting as a point of advice for librarians around the world to contact. The Section has played a significant role in assisting the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the judging and presentation of the Access to Learning awards

I would now like to concentrate on one of the documents I have already mentioned - *The Public Library Manifesto*. Following its production and publication in 1994 it has been translated and made available in 26 languages.

A critical element of the publication of such documents is the process by which they are agreed with comment and feedback from librarians internationally through working groups, wider advisory panels and from seminars at conferences prior to publication.

The significance of this document was enhanced further by its endorsement by UNESCO and through this system of approval the document has been able to be used by libraries world wide as touchstones for reference when planning library services or creating policy documents.

As you can appreciate the process of production is time consuming so it is sensible ask ourselves why we need the IFLA/Unesco Public Libraries Manifesto?

Let us look at some elements of the manifesto;

- *The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision- making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.*

This is a very important statement early on in the manifesto and is used as a reference point for the later Public Library Guidelines for Development which came out of the Manifesto.

- *The Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.*

When we live in a world where war, terrorism, poverty and illiteracy exists in such abundance, statements like these underline the significant role the public library can play, not just in society at large, but to all individuals in that society.

- *UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries.*

This sentence is a powerful advocacy statement for Librarians to use when arguing the case as to why public libraries are not only important, but essential.

The Manifesto also states that;

- *Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and of individuals are fundamental human values*

And that these values can;

- *Only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society*

Democracy, is of course not a universal state or a level playing field in its application. For some democracy can be a painful struggle to achieve and we have recent examples in Iraq and Afghanistan as testament to this fact. In Iraq the web log of the National Librarian made available through IFLA listserves has been an absorbing, yet terrifying, account of how the struggle to maintain and preserve a national written culture at a time of national crisis can require personal sacrifices by librarians at all levels. And yet democracy has been proven to be the political model which most enables individuals to enjoy freedom and prosperity as has been seen in the former Soviet states. It will be interesting to see what the recent campaigns in Hong Kong for direct elections result in for that former colony of the UK.

The Manifesto asserts that;

- *The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users.*

Although written at a time when the Internet was still in its infancy as far as development was concerned, this important assertion covers the role that libraries should and do achieve in providing information in digital form as well as the printed one and is of use to us when justifying why libraries are no longer just about books as some people still think. While there is an onus on us as Librarians and Information Scientists to be impartial and unbiased in providing information, there is still the need, greater now than ever before with

the unregulated nature of the Internet, to be critical and questioning of information we see presented and to pass that on to our clients and users.

- *The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status*

The importance of equal access is so fundamental to a truly effective public library and this means reaching out and including excluded communities/ethnic groups. I am aware of the important work that is going on in Barcelona City to ensure that is happening with migrant and refugee communities and this is admirable and I applaud you. Ensuring such equality is provided, is something that needs to be embedded in every part of our service from the physical to the intellectual. e.g. in Penang, Malaysia a multicultural community of Muslim, Christian Chinese, Hindu and Buddhist people is served by a stock policy which states that the book fund for the locality must be divided in direct relation to the percentage of these populations in the community. That is an example of how rigour must be applied to ensure equality is delivered. In the UK a law entitled the Disability Discrimination Act applies the same kind of requirement on all public organisations, including libraries, to provide a fully accessible service whether that be through “*mobility, manual dexterity, speech, hearing, seeing and memory*” (*Disability Discrimination Act (1995 & 2005)*)⁸.

The Manifesto has a distinct perspective on the issue of social inclusion and states that;

- *Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison.*

This does give substantial challenges to Libraries in communities where the language diversification is great. The challenge is hard enough in better resourced countries and libraries but in communities which are struggling, the challenge becomes massive e.g. In South Africa there are 17 indigenous languages alone to represent in the collections of libraries.

It also has something to say about “new” technologies;

Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials.

The convergence of printed and digital technologies is going to come to a head in the next few years for public libraries. The impact of downloading of music and film for example is going to challenge the traditional lending services of many libraries. Will we have a role in this digital environment? How will we establish that? The availability of e-books has shown that libraries can provide services through downloading or direct loan of MP3 or palm top devices. I think that by 2010 public libraries will have taken up a position in the

marketplace for music and film in the same way as they have adapted to the new technologies of tape and CD and there is already evidence of this happening in the USA with MyVideo services. e.g. Jacksonville Libraries, USA.

The acceleration of digitisation programmes of the printed word for libraries will undoubtedly take place over the next 3 years also but this is not going to be either complete nor will the demand for the printed book have disappeared in that timescale. That will take a lot longer. However, libraries will undoubtedly concentrate on the unique materials held such as special collections and local studies material which will make a significant difference in the global digital environment.

In terms of cultural and social understanding the Manifesto states;

- *Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavour and imagination.*

A good example of a library service which is challenging traditional values in societies which are changing fast is the “borrow a prejudice” service provided in Malmo Library, Sweden where library users are invited to borrow a person to inform them of how people’s lifestyles can and do vary. So far the “titles” have included an imam, a veiled Muslim woman, a homosexual man and a homosexual woman, an animal rights activist, a Danish woman, a transvestite, a journalist, a blind man, a traveller, a Rom woman, a gypsy, a librarian, a businessman, an Arab, a clergyman, an ex-convict, a feminist and a homeless man.

On censorship and control the Manifesto states that;

- *Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures.*

This is a challenge that has frequently been lost when we look back in history whether it be the burning of books in Nazi controlled Germany, the censorship applied by benign dictators in some African countries e.g. Banda’s Malawi or the cultural despoliation to archives and art work which took place in war torn Iraq in the last few years. The risk which war places on non-digitised original cultural work is something that IFLA has also been concerned with and has supported and promoted the Blue Shield scheme for the protection of international cultural heritage under its Preservation and Conservation (PAC) activities.

The Manifesto contains more support and recommendations for public libraries under the headings of;

- Missions

The manifesto provides twelve key missions which relate to information, literacy, education and culture which should be at the core of public library

services. I am not going to explore all twelve of those missions today but have selected areas which have some direct potential in the arena of the use of the Internet.

Key mission 8 concerns “supporting the oral tradition” and here it is easy to recognise that the facilities available under the Web 2.0 environment for recording and capturing the contemporary oral and visual history of our cultures is possible through the social networking facilities provided by environments like Myspace, Youtube and Facebook. We know that this is already happening and libraries are starting to fulfil that potential, for example the Aarhus Public Library in Denmark recently placed a documentary of ideas produced by involving the local population through something called the *Transformation Lab - Prototyping the Future* which is an interactive facility using sound and visual stimuli for receiving all types of information on what the library of the future should offer and look like. The web links for this and the following children’s workshop on their ideas are provided in my paper from this lecture.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpFO_L_jA1c

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YhMbUI2qWE>

I have picked another example of a library using Web 2.0 actively to record oral history in St. Joseph County Public Library, USA. On their site at <http://marylaine.com/lib20.html> they offer the following statements which I found helpful;

"Library 2.0 is, perhaps above all else, the idea of constant change. Not only constant library change, but the recognition that our communities are constantly changing and that our services to them must change proportionately." Michael Casey

"Library 2.0 simply means making your library's space (virtual and physical) more interactive, collaborative, and driven by community needs." Sarah Houghton-Jan

Returning to the key missions of the Manifesto I’d also highlight Key Mission 11 which is concerned with *facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills*. It is vital that this mission is interpreted to relate to not only our staff and students of librarianship, but our users also. There are many programmes around the world to show how this mission is being implemented, however, I believe that the challenge for all practitioners is in keeping those skills updated and passing them on to users of all ages. This is so indispensable that it may need to be regulated through a continuing development programme for our staff where reaccreditation of the professional qualification is required on a regular basis. In my view the need for continuing professional development in this area has never been so vital than in any other aspect of public library service delivery in the past. If we do not maintain and improve our presence in the Internet environment we will be left behind as a relevant service to our communities.

- Funding, legislation and networks

In the next area of the Manifesto we come onto some core aspects of providing a service. The Manifesto states;

The public library shall in principle be free of charge.

This is a vital ingredient to the freedom and equality of access embedded in the Manifesto, but is being challenged in many parts of the world through financial pressure on public services. In the UK, the Government provided funds to establish the *Peoples Network* to every public library authority in the country on condition that no charge was made for access to the service. However, this is proving increasingly difficult where there is financial pressure, particularly in trying to sustain the service and in some libraries charges are made for people not living in the local community or after a period of time of use i.e. the first hour of use is free of charge.

This part of the Manifesto also states;

To ensure nationwide library coordination and cooperation, legislation and strategic plans must also define and promote a national library network based on agreed standards of service.

Agreed standards are easier to control in traditional areas of service such as accessibility to buildings, hours of opening a library, number of books or expenditure per capita (per 1,000 population) but when it comes to regulating the anarchic environment of the web, particularly Web 2.0, then the difficulties become apparent to us all. How do we stop our users creating an alternative web site or blog on our Library services, or indeed, do we really want to? In my own Library I have a group of passionate users who are setting up a review site of libraries in London and my Library is to be featured on it, fortunately, they are keen to get our views and advice on the things that are being presented. How easily that could not be the case. We all know of the fragility and unreliability of information on the Web and maintaining accuracy is now becoming a duty for us if we have any chance of maintaining national standards where they exist in relation to the Internet.

- Operation and management

Finally, this Manifesto provides some important guidelines in relation to the operation and management of the library.

A clear policy must be formulated, defining objectives, priorities and services in relation to the local community needs. The public library has to be organized effectively and professional standards of operation must be maintained.

The aspect I want to pick up on here is on how we go about determining “local community needs” since this is significant to how we address any future development of the services offered, whether it be Internet related or otherwise. I would draw your attention to another online resource produced by the Public Libraries Section of IFLA entitled *Meeting User Needs*. This is an updated resource (last updated in August 2007) on IFLANET which provides references and web links to best practices all around the world on the various strategies and techniques for ensuring that your library is keeping in touch with the needs of its users and potential users. The resource covers the topics of; use of surveys; statistical analysis of trends; friends and user groups; focus groups; use of suggestions and comments schemes; using staff groups including pooling verbal feedback from users.

I will leave the topic of the Public Library Manifesto with the last words in the document;

Decision makers at national and local levels and the library community at large, around the world, are hereby urged to implement the principles expressed in this Manifesto.

However, for your reference, the imperatives of the Manifesto are being further promoted with a project currently being progressed by the IFLA Public Libraries Section under the working title of *Bringing the Manifesto into the 21st Century – 10 ways to achieve its aims* and this will use best practice examples, including contemporary settings, of how the Manifesto is relevant to our work in the digitised society today.

The Manifesto is also the backbone of the IFLA/Unesco Public Library Guidelines for Development which have been translated into 45 languages since 2001, 9 of which are available free to download from IFLANET.

The development of the Internet has been faster and more accessible than any technology that the human race has had to adapt to. The wheel, the printed book, the steam engine, the typewriter, the motor car all had lead in periods which took anything from tens of years to hundreds of years to be accessible to more than a privileged number of people due to the high cost of participation or their position in society. I have already given examples of how far Libraries have developed with the Internet in 15 years and during that time Libraries have adopted the availability of the Internet and the world wide web to accommodate;

- Information searching
- A library web presence
- Digitisation of printed and analogue audio resources
- Online databases
- E-books
- Downloading
- E-services from email, webcam and videocam transmission
- More recently - blogs, wikis, social networks, podcasts, RSS feeds for information updating, use of folksonomies, tag clouds

So we have adapted our services to the world-wide web environment, but in doing so have we achieved any sense of maturity about the use of the net or to put it more succinctly a world-wide wisdom? I will explain more on what I mean by this as we look through the IFLA Internet Manifesto together since this gives us a touchstone for where I see public libraries developing their Internet services not only in 2010 but further into the future.

This Manifesto was agreed unanimously at the IFLA Conference in Glasgow, Scotland in 2002 and was updated with the Internet Manifesto Guidelines in 2006. It is freely available in 19 languages on IFLANET and I am pleased to note that once again these include both Catalan and Spanish translations.

The Manifesto begins by stating that;

- *Unhindered access to information is essential to freedom, equality, global understanding and peace.*

It goes onto to assert that;

- *Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual both to hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information; it is the basis of democracy; and it is at the core of library service.*

Here again as with the Public Library Manifesto we find the common themes of intellectual freedom, the right of the individual to make decisions concerning their life and the importance of a democratic society to encourage these life positions.

The essential role of the library and information profession is emphasised through the second assertion;

- *Freedom of access to information, regardless of medium and frontiers, is a central responsibility of the library and information profession.*

And is supported further by the third assertion;

- *The provision of unhindered access to the Internet by libraries and information services supports communities and individuals to attain freedom, prosperity and development.*

Finally the fourth main assertion is that;

- *Barriers to the flow of information should be removed, especially those that promote inequality, poverty, and despair.*

These are all very familiar assertions and resonate with the Public Library Manifesto closely. So I'd like to dig a little deeper and look at some of the challenges which we face in trying to meet these demands on the profession.

The Manifesto states that Library and Information services are vibrant institutions that;

- *Connect people with global information resources and the ideas and creative works they seek*

But how well can we, or do we, do that? Much use of the Internet in libraries is done on a self service basis where users enter the library, log on, browse, email, download and leave. Libraries can do, and in some cases are doing, much more but we have barely touched the surface, I would guess, in connecting people to as much as 10% of the ideas and creative works available. To do this our role as educators and content providers has still got to open up and develop a great deal. There has also been a step forward for encouraging this since the establishment of the Creative Commons (CC) environment on the Internet in 2001. This is a non-profit organisation devoted to expanding the range of creative work available for others legally to build upon and share but retain copyrights based on a variety of licensing and contract schemes. The concerns about content protection on the Internet can be alleviated, though not removed completely, and we can look more confidently to the digitisation of our unique and special collections through such environments.

Source <http://creativecommons.org/>

The Manifesto continues that we should;

- *Make available the richness of human expression and cultural diversity*

Here, there has to be some important step changes in the barriers that exist on the Internet through language translation and the predominance of English as the original operating language within it. When I searched under the term University of Barcelona and visited the website I was able to look at it in Catalan, Spanish and English – when I visited the web site of a well known University in London which professes to encourage international applications from students I found only English.

When I visited the website of one of the 10th largest libraries in the world, Shanghai Library (China), I found the options for English, Chinese and Japanese. The British Library with collections from Asia, Pacific and Africa, East and West Europe offer – no other language other than English.

In the USA it has been Hispanic Heritage Month from 15 September – 15 October. The Library of Congress has a host of material on the site but no Spanish language option to access that. The New York Public Library similarly is celebrating that month and to give them there due, although it is not on their home page, the pages are accessible in Spanish when you enter into the site further.

SLIDE

The current statistics of Internet languages used on the web is divided as follows;

English	31.2%
Chinese	15.7%
Spanish	8.7%
Japanese	7.4%
French	5.0%
German	5.0%
Portuguese	4.0%
Korean	2.0%
Italian	2.7%
Arabic	2.5 %
Rest of the world	15%

The single largest growth language between 2000 – 2007 is Arabic at 940.5%. I ask the question, how accessible this language is culture is on the Internet to non-Arabic speakers and vice-versa for Arabic speakers accessing the English speaking world.

- source <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>

All of this is just skirting around what is a major international compatibility problem which I think will be different by 2010. Google Translator can already translate 8 languages from English for you, Wikipedia now offers 200 languages, it is only a matter of time for these types of software interfaces to become ubiquitous and library websites and catalogues must follow.

In addition to the barrier of language, I have to add the barrier of the “invisible web”. This is well known to librarians and ICT professionals, but for many the resources hidden from search engines through online catalogues and databases and those requiring passwords or logins are a lost resource which will never be found by routine “googling”. The work of the Librarian begins here to assist users to find what they want as we have been doing for hundreds of years with different technologies. I believe that this is where our role as enablers is evolving into that of educators and trainers, perhaps even personal advisors but I think that possibility, as a sea change, will take longer to happen than the next 3 years for the whole of our profession.

Then there are the barriers of cultural understanding to overcome and this is where a little of what I mean by world wide wisdom comes in. Our communities have become increasingly multicultural and international mobility fuelled not just by low air fares but by increased awareness and sometimes unfortunately through peril of war or economic poverty – perhaps both together. As Librarians, we need to be able to tap the resources available around the world to increase our understanding of other cultures and work together with our colleagues world wide to find answers to problems and challenges which present themselves when trying to serve people from cultures we are not familiar with.

In the UK, we have received an unprecedented number of Polish émigrés into the country following the enlargement of the European Union. Slough is a town of 119,000 people in the UK. I read recently that the town has welcomed 10,000 Polish people in its population since 2004. The impact of that is huge, but the Library website has very little to reflect that by way of activities or significant collections, nor any links with the Libraries in Poland on its website to try and provide information on the cultural interest of this new and still growing community.

Slough is not alone, and probably not the most notable case of numbers of immigrant workers in a population, but it represents a situation which needs a response through the new delivery of services, yet often arises without additional resources to match. Such situations could be addressed at low cost through international links with librarians in different countries, staff exchanges, language learning and the use of the Internet to assist with information needs, recommended book purchasing, newspapers, hot web links and a lot more.

- *The global Internet enables individuals and communities throughout the world, whether in the smallest and most remote villages or the largest cities, to have equality of access to information for personal development, education, stimulation, cultural enrichment, economic activity and informed participation in democracy.*

The barrier of distance can inhibit even the accessibility of the Internet. Many countries share this challenge with remote communities in Amazonian rainforests, the mountainous areas of Tibet and Nepal, the forests and rivers of Malaysia and time and time again librarians find creative ways of extending their services to remote communities by means of lap tops, use of satellite technology and by physically overcoming the environmental barriers using mobile libraries in the form of boats, planes, use of donkeys, elephants, camels and just by walking to the area of need.

Sarawak, Malaysia – boats braving rapids and cars on timber tracks
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla73/papers/128-Bolhassan-en.pdf>

Guangdong Province, China – mountainous regions on foot
http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla73/papers/128-Qunqing_Zhaochun-en.pdf

Nepal – mountainous regions on foot
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/GlobalDevelopment/GlobalLibraries/AccessLearningAward/2006Award/default.htm>

Bangladesh – boats in flood prone regions
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/GlobalDevelopment/GlobalLibraries/AccessLearningAward/2005Award/default.htm>

Australia – access for aboriginal people
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/GlobalDevelopment/GlobalLibraries/AccessLearningAward/2007Award/default.htm>

Brazilian rainforests

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/6509973.stm>

Satellite dishes on elephants in India

<http://www.ifla.org/VII/s38/news/mobile01-02.pdf>

Kenya – Camel Libraries

<http://www.knls.or.ke/camel.htm>

The Internet Manifesto further states that;

- *Libraries and information services provide essential gateways to the Internet. For some they offer convenience, guidance, and assistance, while for others they are the only available access points. They provide a mechanism to overcome the barriers created by differences in resources, technology, and training.*

The challenges here are explicit and our role to assist people disengaged through a lack of resources, technology and training is a hard one but it is nevertheless a vital one. We must provide skills for life training and resources for people to be able to engage with and be included in their society and though increased literacy (whether it be reading, computing or numerate literacy) we can assist those who are at a disadvantage in our communities. This goes back to the issues of social inclusion I have already discussed but is an essential role to help overcome the “digital divide”.

The Manifesto is very helpful in stating;

- *Access to the Internet and all of its resources should be consistent with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and especially Article 19:*

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

It continues;

- *The global interconnectedness of the Internet provides a medium through which this right may be enjoyed by all. Consequently, access should neither be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor to economic barriers.*

However good the situation may look in developed countries there is still a long way to go when we look at world parity and the digital divide becomes apparent when examining the statistics of Internet penetration.

The 2007 net ratings of internet use in North America is 69.5% of the population

In East Timor that rating is 0.1% (i.e. 1,000 people in a population of 1 million.

In Liberia that rating is 0.03% (i.e. 1,000 people in a population of over 3 million.

In Africa, the average penetration of the Internet is just 4.7% of the population or just under 44 million of over 933 million people.

Source: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/>

There is still much work to be done to ensure that cultural understanding and access to the powerful information tool, which the Internet undoubtedly is, can be shared and enjoyed by all.

- *Libraries and information services should support the right of users to seek information of their choice.*

The directive is clear here and I believe the motivation of the profession is at a high level, however, the difficulty to be overcome is that of how we can assist people making their choices. Many librarians are governed by the ethic of providing information but not advice – in fact in the UK we are trained to positively not go beyond that passive role. However, I believe that in the future the profession will go beyond that threshold and the role of Librarians will be that of the information broker who can advise individuals on the best choices to make and take responsibility for that advice, which will be legally accountable. In the meantime, our advice will still be couched in terms of assistance like “have you thought about?” or “I have found that I couldn’t get a reliable result by searching in that way or through that site”.

- *Libraries and information services should respect the privacy of their users and recognize that the resources they use should remain confidential.*

To ensure that libraries can fulfil that responsibility we have to have good systems in place for protection of that confidentiality and that means in terms of laws, people and technology. Our profession needs to be trained and continually reminded of the need for confidentiality in our transactions with the public for data protection and the sensibilities of privileged information about our users. This has always been necessary but now the possibilities for information leaks or loss have reached a greater scale and portability. The data from the computer I referred to at the beginning of my lecture which relied on kilometres of magnetic tape, can now be stored on a single USB stick which goes in our pockets and that data can be streamed around the globe in a matter of seconds with the assistance of satellite technology. We learnt about the vulnerability of confidential data with the theft of a lap top belonging to a bank in the UK recently. Such events are warnings to us all

and our systems software for preventing data leakage must be the best now and in the future if we are to avoid damage to the credibility of, and the trust our users have in, public libraries.

But we need good legislation also and this is a role for our leaders and strategists of the future to maintain and influence. IFLA played a significant role in the discussion on the World Summit on the Information Society at the Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) summits and this extract from the Tunis document highlights that issue;

Section 58. *We recognize that Internet governance includes more than Internet naming and addressing. It also includes other significant public policy issues such as, inter alia, critical Internet resources, the security and safety of the Internet, and developmental aspects and issues pertaining to the use of the Internet.*

Source: <http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html>

- *Libraries and information services have a responsibility to facilitate and promote public access to quality information and communication. Users should be assisted with the necessary skills and a suitable environment in which to use their chosen information sources and services freely and confidently.*

So how do we achieve that in the Internet society? I believe the role of the profession has got to change dramatically in the future and soon. To be able to provide users with accurate and timely information we have to develop our services on a global basis and with a current awareness to match that.

- *In addition to the many valuable resources available on the Internet, some are incorrect, misleading and may be offensive. Librarians should provide the information and resources for library users to learn to use the Internet and electronic information efficiently and effectively. They should proactively promote and facilitate responsible access to quality networked information for all their users, including children and young people.*

Services such as the Ask a Librarian or Enquire service operating in e.g. U.K, Norway, USA, Australia has an international capacity to deliver online information to enquirers 24 hours a day free of charge through the cooperation of several countries across the international time lines.

Source: <http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/enquire/>

This type of service points the way forward. With increasingly migrant communities and increased levels of travel our capacity to re-act to the needs of users from other countries and cultures has to increase significantly. To do this our future library professional will need a current awareness of global events, national cultures and social mores. We will need to cultivate international communication with colleagues in other countries where the

answers to user's requirements can be found through twinning arrangements, professional training and use of all of the internet communication facilities like online chat rooms, RSS feeds, listserves etc.

It is possible that IFLA has a strong role to play here, to facilitate, engage and encourage but the responsibility will rest with librarians and, as ever, the current needs of the users that we are responding to. However, the needs of our "users" can now be expressed from all around the world and that is another reason why our role has to change. I believe that the fully digitised and accessible public library does not exist yet but even when it does it is our role as librarians which will determine how successful it will be through our ability to provide information, our informed and intelligent "materials" selection and accurate and perceptive cataloguing with meta data for example.

- *In common with other core services, access to the Internet in libraries and information services should be without charge.*

The Manifesto is quite clear in this respect and yet the challenges for public libraries around the world remain in terms of financial support even in the most developed of countries. Many countries were able to introduce a national public library Internet framework with the assistance of their national government e.g. Finland, Malaysia, UK. However, the challenge has now become that of sustainability even in those countries where that initial investment was provided. For developing countries, as I have referred to already, the challenge to provide the basic connectivity is still there for many communities.

The Manifesto concludes with some statements on its implementation;

- *IFLA encourages the international community to support the development of Internet accessibility worldwide, and especially in developing countries, to thus obtain the global benefits of information for all offered by the Internet.*

Work is being done in that capacity with supportive grant schemes such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Access to Learning Awards which has provided \$1 million annually since 2000 to countries to assist with the development of ICT projects with IFLA's involvement. The range of countries has included Finland, Guatemala, Argentina, Colombia, China, South Africa, Denmark, Bangladesh, Nepal and Australia.

Other international support can be provided with schemes such as the Ask A Librarian service and through shared knowledge and training via video cam, virtual library visits, international list serves and support for international aid work such as ethical PC disposal schemes e.g. International Computer Aid

<http://www.computeraid.org/index.htm>

- IFLA encourages all governments to support the unhindered flow of Internet accessible information via libraries and information services and to oppose any attempts to censor or inhibit access.

I started my lecture with reference to censorship and I return to that now as I draw near to my conclusion. The issue of censorship on the Internet is a complex topic which the FAIFE (Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression) part of IFLA is regularly engaged with. The accessibility of information can be regulated and limited by a variety of means.

First there is the barrier of cost. Not all information is free of charge on the web and our profession knows that only to well with online databases aimed at the legal and medical profession for example. However, as more and more information is digitised and available on the Internet, public libraries have to make the difficult decisions on what format is the most appropriate one to provide. By 2010, I think there will have been a considerable change in this position. The use of expensive online databases has not always been encouraging up until now and I know many countries around the world that voice that concern. That is going to change I believe and as the Ipod generation becomes the mainstream the access to information online will not be a choice, it will be a given fact. Public libraries will need to have come fully on stream with that supply in the next 3 years and by bearing the cost as a freely accessible service, make that information available to its users.

In the UK, the Museums, Libraries and Archives agency is assisting public libraries to make that change of provision easier by negotiating discounted rates for access with publishers of databases on the basis of volume. Here again, there is the possibility for international collaboration as this market place becomes more and more global.

Censorship of course can be more overt and there are still examples of where the use of the Internet is regulated and monitored in some countries in a very sophisticated way such as China, and the most restrictive of filters is applied in Burma. However, less restrictive filtering is still applied in countries such as Singapore, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Iran and Cuba where private access to the Internet is still banned and limited to 2% of the population. FAIFE has expressed their deep concern about the continuing violations of the basic human right to freedom of access to information and freedom of expression in Cuba.

Sources:

<http://opennet.net/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship_in_Cuba#_note-1

Our role as librarians, therefore, needs to go beyond that of just information keepers and seekers and support that freedom of access wherever we see it controlled.

Lastly, the Internet Manifesto states;

- IFLA urges the library community and decision makers at national and local levels to develop strategies, policies, and plans that implement the principles expressed in this Manifesto.

It is clear from that our roles as influencers, advocates and negotiators will be as strong a requirement for the future as ever it has been in the past.

I have tried to be as none technical as possible, but in conclusion, I hope that you will share with me the conviction that our public libraries have a relevant role in the developing world of Internet provision. Our skills will have to be continually developed and enhanced but I believe that the degree of success of the public library and its' role with the Internet by 2010 will be determined by how well we;

- Liberate our services using the world wide web using Web 2.0 and look towards Web 4.0
- Connect with our communities and educate and train where required
- Develop a world wide wisdom – global knowledge and understanding
- Work internationally to erode barriers and censorship but respecting all cultures
- Support our staff by continued training and encouragement to be proactive
- Develop our digitised collections services and knowledge - the hybrid library – knowledge, education and information in diverse forms
- Improved accessibility to our catalogues and databases
- Establish national and international standards on the Internet environment
- Develop public library buildings with the emphasis as community/cultural spaces not physical stores of knowledge

I was asked to look at public libraries and the Internet in 2010 and that date is not so far away. However, I have peered a little further into the future and I leave you with some more thoughts of how librarians and public libraries could be working beyond that time.

- The fully digitised knowledge environment – the book is dead, long live the book! Knowledge in 3D – librarian avatars
- Public libraries as cultural storehouses – the “lived” environment alongside the “recorded” one – archives, museums, libraries and culture combined.
- International cultural pathways on the web
- Full language compatibility on the web online both with visual and audio content.
- Librarians and Information Scientists as educators and personal knowledge advisors not keepers of keys or Internet gatekeepers

It may be a “brave new world that has such people in it”⁹ but I hope that this and the rest of my paper will give some food for thought and I thank you all for listening.

References

1. The IFLA/Unesco Public Library Manifesto. IFLA. 1994.
2. The Public Library Service: IFLA/UNESCO guidelines for development. IFLA Publications 97. Munchen, Germany. Saur 2001. ISBN 3-598-21827-3
3. The IFLA Internet Manifesto. IFLA. 2002 and updated with the Internet Manifesto Guidelines 2006.
4. The Multicultural Manifesto (Draft). IFLA Multicultural Section. 2007.
5. The Guidelines for Babies and Young Children. IFLA Children’s and Young Adults Section. 2007.
6. Meeting User Needs. Online Resource List. IFLANET (First issued 2005 and last updated August 2007 on www.ifla.org)
7. The Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning. A project under the section of Public Libraries. IFLA. 2003.
8. Disability Discrimination Act. The Stationery Office (TSO). London. UK. ISBN 0 10 541105 1. 1995 & 2005
9. Shakespeare, William The Tempest. First Folio. Stationer’s Company. 1623. Later quoted in Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, Chatto & Windos. London, UK. 1932.

John Lake

Chairperson of the IFLA Public Libraries Section and Secretary of the Division for Libraries Serving the General Public

Barbican Library

Barbican Centre, Silk Street

London EC2Y 8DS

UNITED KINGDOM

Tel: +44(20) 7382 7098

Fax: +44(20) 7638 2249

john.lake@cityoflondon.gov.uk