GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

Report of the KM SECTION meeting
How a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future

11 – 25 June 2017

Contributors

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Introduction

Between 11 and 25 June 2017, from their own countries in 3 continents, 18 librarians participated in a conversation about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. Together we represent 365 years of library experience.

The participants are Standing Committee members of the IFLA Knowledge Management Section. All of them are working librarians at higher positions in their institutions. Namely, they are higher officials at university libraries and library schools; they work at companies, public, government and corporate / special libraries. They come from seven (8) countries including the countries of the creators of the report.

The participants are involved in the conversation about the challenges libraries will face in the years to come. They try to explore how a connected library field can meet the challenges of the future. The participants share their ideas and contribute to the global discussion in the library field based on the kick-off meeting in Athens, Greece. The participants also share the common vision of the Knowledge Management Section, which is to be the "voice of global KM" in the international information community. The IFLA KM Section provides an international platform for professional communication and understanding of the significance of KM for libraries.

Following the Athens meeting, during the first scheduled meeting of the Chair of the IFLA KM Section with the officers who are responsible for the organization of the KM activities and events during the forthcoming IFLA WLIC 2017, it was decided that the most appropriate way to communicate with the Standing Committee members was an online survey. It was difficult to organize a two-hour Skype meeting with 25 Standing Committee members (including corresponding members) from different countries with different communication facilities and the time difference. The questions during the Athens meeting were used to construct the online survey that was disseminated via Survey Monkey. The survey included the possibility to add different answers to those proposed and/or to explain why an answer had been chosen among those proposed. The participants were strongly invited to use this free answer.

A first email was sent to the SC members on June 11, 2017 informing them about the survey. Then the Chair invited each of the SC members to answer the questions of the survey by 25 June 2017.

The respondents agree that equal and free access to information is the most significant value for libraries which must be barrier free (Q4). Access to most relevant resources is a main asset for libraries. Traditionally, libraries are good in organization and information management (Q5). Libraries though should experiment with innovation and technology (Q6). They should also stop justifying themselves of being useful (Q7). They think that the main challenge for libraries is the inability to find the most accurate information in a mass of resources on the internet and a main concern for libraries is not to be marginalized by competitors such as the Internet (Q9). Among the main professional challenges are keeping up with technology and facing the cut of funds, together with time management (Q10). A united library field should balance between the human side and the organization side of the management and adopt cooperation as a general approach, also with competitors (Q11). A global vision connected with local strategy is the characteristic of a united library field (Q12). Its focus is partnerships and engagement with the community (Q13).

A vision for libraries

Libraries enable literate, informed and participative societies. When we look at the future, according to the remote debate, this means that libraries "create opportunity to engage in community issues / diversity / human rights challenges". Libraries also fill "the knowledge gap between society, its creativity and its needs depending on each situation". They pursue this goal giving access to information and knowledge, keeping pace with innovation, creating networks with all the components of the society, managing economic and human resources in the best way. And, of course, in the perspective of our Section, managing knowledge, a key resource in this changing time.

To cite a recent article by Joseph Janes (American Libraries Magazine. *Revisiting an Old Friend: Libraries and their social context*.), which in turn quotes the Jesse Shera's textbook *Introduction to Library Science*, "you can't remove libraries from their social context…; as societies have moved on, the aims and goals of and for libraries have shifted, too, but they remain instrumentalities. Not just good ideas, not just nice to have, but means to ends, and as those societies evolve, so might the goals and means."

The core values of libraries (Q4):

1. *Access – equal and free (26%)*

2. *Protect cultural heritage / memory (14%)*

3. *Innovation (12%)*

4. *Community / service focus and support (8%)*

5. *Universal literacy (8%) - Collaboration and partnerships (8%) -Freedom of expression and privacy (8%) - Lifelong learning (8%)*

Comments:

Among the core values are to share practices through new kinds of information and that libraries be places free of barriers.

Libraries are exceptionally good at (Q5):

1. *Access to information and knowledge (24%)*

2. *Organization and information management (22%)*

3. *Collections and preservation (18%)*

4. *Provide space / place (6%)*

5. *Literacy (6%) - Doing more with less (creativity) (6%) – Networking (6%) - Teaching / guidance / educating (6%)*

Comments:

Other suggestions were: filling the knowledge gap between society, its creativity and its needs depending on each situation; access to the MOST RELEVANT resources.

Libraries should do more of (Q6):

1. *Experiment with technology / digital (19%)*
2. *Collaboration / partnerships (15%)*
3. *Advocacy (13%)*
4. *Collect and preserve knowledge / heritage (8%)*
5. *Community outreach (8%) – Communication (9%) - Education and literacy (9%)*

Comments:

Libraries should combine their cultural capital with innovation.

Libraries should do less of (Q7):

1. *Maintaining redundant services (18%)*
2. *Resisting and fearing change (18%)*
3. *Complaining (11%)*
4. *Doing what others do better (9%)*
5. *Passivity (9%) - Complaining (9%) - Second-guessing our users' needs and expectations (9) - Being insular (institutionally and professionally) (9%)*

Comments:

In general, libraries should be more self-confident: stop justifying themselves of being useful and think positively about their contribution to the society they serve.

Challenges and solutions

The main challenges to society (Q8):

1. *Human crisis (war, famine, poverty) (17%)*
2. *Failure of democracy, corruption, misinformation (17%)*
3. *Impact of the internet on society (15%)*
4. *Terrorism, nationalism, radicalism (13%)*
5. *Climate change (13%)*

Comments:

The inability to find the most accurate information in a mass of resources on the internet was also considered a threat.

The main challenges to libraries (Q9):

1. *Staying relevant (needs assessment/trends) (30%)*
2. *Funding (26%)*
3. *Change management (9%)*
4. *Dealing with new user demands (migration / diversity) (9%)*
5. *Legal environment (privacy, copyright) (6%) - Changing political environment (6%)*

Comments:

Staying relevant means not to be marginalized by competitors such as Internet.

The main professional challenges (Q10):

1. *Keeping up with technology (15%)*
2. *Doing more with less (15%)*
3. *Visibility of the profession (13%)*
4. *Flexibility to evolve (13%)*
5. *Better professional development / career progression (11%)*

Comments:

On the managerial side, the issue of time management was stressed. On the side of the purpose of libraries, to ensure a better support to communities was considered a main issue.

How a united library field can make a difference

How should a united library field help meet the challenges identified (Q11)?

1. *Cooperation with others (including competitors) (15%)*
2. *Create an environment that encourage change (15%)*
3. *Strategic planning and better metrics (11%)*
4. *Stronger advocacy at all levels (9%)*
5. *Create a clear vision / brand for the library sector (9%)*

Comments:

A united library field can help all libraries to find a good balance between human aspects, technology and organisational aspects. Knowledge management is a key approach to face this need.

The characteristics of a united library field (Q12):

1. *A global vision connected with local strategy (16%)*
2. *Strong and visionary leadership (16%)*
3. *Powerful partnerships (14%)*
4. *Support infrastructure – standards, training, toolkits, communication space (14%)*
5. *Work together, be open and share knowledge (12%)*

Comments:

When the global vision for libraries is adjusted to the local strategy of each library, the result is the implementation of similar functions and services.

The focus of a united library field (Q13):

1. *Partnerships (with library and non-library environment) (33%)*
2. *Collections that address communities' needs (14%)*
3. *Stimulate community engagement (12%)*
4. *Library staff skills development (10%)*
5. *Promote library assets (10%)*

Comments:

Cooperation, partnership, engagement in community challenges, with an emphasis on diversity and human rights are the keywords.

A global conversation

This report is created in an interactive process, in Rome and Athens on July 5, 2017. It is part of a global conversation initiated by IFLA on how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future.

Over the course of two years (2017-2018), IFLA will involve as many librarians and others as possible in this global conversation. Participants are encouraged to continue the conversation in their own networks and organization and share the results with IFLA. At the end of 2017, the first results of all the workshops and online discussions will be turned into a *Global Vision Report*, which in turn will be adapted into concrete strategies, processes and work programmes in 2018.

To learn more about the global conversation, and download supporting materials to support your own activities, visit globalvision.ifla.org.

Stay tuned for news about the IFLA Global Vision discussion following #iflaGlobalVision and make sure to cast your vote in August when the online voting platform is available on https://globalvision.ifla.org/.