GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

Report of the Women, information and libraries SIG online survey

How a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future

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Contributors

This report is created by:

Mathilde Koskas
Evviva Weinraub

Jenifer Bartle

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Introduction

In June 2017, in an online form, 4 librarians participated in a conversation about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. Together we represent 37 years of library experience.

Due to the fact that the participants were spread out all over the planet, and that some of the SIG's sympathizers are members of other IFLA professional units and had had the discussion in that context already, the group decided to gather answers in an online form.

A vision for libraries

Libraries enable literate, informed and participative societies. When we look at the future, according to the debates in the Women, information and libraries SIG online survey this means that libraries have:

- *a key role in human development*
- *a place for all*
- *a chance to give open access to everyone*
- *a power to bring people together, transcending divisions, through the value of information sharing*

The core values of libraries (Q4):

1. *Providing access to information for all*
2. *Preservation of information and sharing cultural heritage*
3. *Encouraging intellectual freedom, fostering democracy, creating opportunities for an informed citizenry through advocating for information privacy, literacy, education and lifelong learning…*
4. *Being inclusive: valuing diversity of thoughts, resources, services, and the communities we serve*
5. *Serving the public good, professionalism, service, social responsibility*

Comments:

Libraries are exceptionally good at (Q5):

1. *Organization, management of and giving access to reliable information, based on standards*
2. *Making space for cultural production and social inclusion through education. Talking to our users about their needs and instilling knowledge, so that they can build better lives*
3. *Preserving heritage.*
4. *Cooperative work*
5. *Thinking about the common good.*

Comments:

Libraries should do more of (Q6):

1. *Value cooperation over perfection, be ready to experiment and give ourselves permission to fail. Cooperate more, also with other communities, and with projects that leverage the power of technology*

2. *Promote intellectual freedom and access to information.*

3. *Think about who we are we not serving, what are the barrier, how to reach them?*
   Not have a single way of serving patrons. Adapt to different needs. Creating inclusive spaces for open, frank, and thoughtful conversation

4. *Communication - making our range of services known to all. Avoid specialist vocabularies when possible. Meet users where they are. Think beyond the walls of the library. Extend expression possibilities for users*

5. *Teaching on how to do advocacy*

6. *Creative fundraising*

Comments:

Libraries should do less of (Q7):

1. *Worry less about perfection. Being afraid of our mistakes – it's okay to try and fail. It's also okay, to try it again after you fail*

2. *Trying to do more with less – we have a "yes AND" problem*

3. *Don't let bureaucracy get in the way of progress. Fewer committees, less administration, less time spent chasing funding, making plans and reports*

4. *Fight the lack of decision making, taking forever to get something done, or sticking to rules instead of good sense*

5. *Not paying enough attention to user needs and development of information technology*

6. *Lying to ourselves that we are protecting privacy – with our focus on metrics, we really aren't*

7. *Clinging to the bibliographer model of user engagement – need to be strategic about collaborative areas*

8. *We should stop being business centers, and embrace being information hubs*

9. *Less individual cataloguing and more shared metadata – focusing on cataloguing unique/valuable content rather than re-cataloguing shelf-ready materials*

Comments:

Challenges and solutions

The main challenges to society (Q8):

1. *Inequalities, financial inequity; and what seems to be a rising polarization of political discourse. Lack of empathy, poor understanding of power struggles and civil rights.*
2. *Environmental crisis, Wars and conflicts, Regime change*
3. *Literacy & education. It's so easy to manipulate truth in the society of today.*
4. *Societies are no more interested in books!*

Comments:

The main challenges to libraries (Q9):

1. *Growth through acceptance of the ever changing role of the library in society*
2. *Having a place as a trusted source of information - balanced information, that can be researched in depth. This is at odds with shifting culture on information, consumer culture, expectations of immediate answer, etc.*
3. *Challenges to preservation of information – many disposable media, constant change in technology and legal environment, keeping the balance between promotion of access to information and personal information protection; many obstacles to doing actual digital preservation and curation (as opposed to simple backups)*
4. *Perception of the value of libraries. Our image with the public is often a positive but outdated one. With people in charge of funding, convincing them of our usefulness. The problem is how they measure it*
5. *"Fake news" and issues around digital citizenship and digital literacy*
6. *Censorship.*
7. *From a metadata point of view: the cost of standards (producing, maintaining, accessing them for use). The risk of losing our open standards, putting libraries on an unequal footing based on resources.*
8. *Changing the narrative around "everything is available online"*

Comments:

Since technology is a means of communication, if the technology access or infrastructure isn't equal it adds barriers.

The main professional challenges (Q10):

1. *Articulating and advocating for the relevancy of libraries (and understanding how to perform advocacy)*
2. *Reduced resources -- Idea that we can do more with less*

3. *To maintain the amount of empathy, knowledge and passion to successfully guide users to benefit from the vast amount of resources made available in a library.*

4. *Standards, to permit cooperation, building information systems across communities*

5. *The idea that everyone just wants a google seach for everything (who needs complex catalogues, index searches, bibliographies?!) Balance between maintaining the quality of metadata and to provide prompt service.*

6. *Balancing technology innovation with providing basic services*

7. *Understanding that our profession is more about project management and relationships than about books and periodicals.*

8. *Fighting against the corporatization of information*

Comments:

How a united library field can make a difference

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

1. *Share knowledge and know-how with each other, not "just" information. The WLIC-format today needs to be developed. That means inter-personal connections; real-life meetings, reliable communication tools. Through contact and creative interaction between professionals with similar professional goals. Discussion groups to assist those interested in developing their professionalism*

2. *Advocacy--pooled from us all, on behalf of the whole library community. Teaching about how to engage in advocacy and supporting those efforts*

3. *Promote our work beyond our own profession. Show what value we bring to answering today's challenges when we provide verified metadata, guaranteed by international standards (= access to information!)*
   Part of this work can't be automated and deserves to be funded.

4. *Thinking back on Society's challenges (Q8): serving all patrons, especially those who have no other resources, means helping make societies fairer. It also means giving people means to meet these challenges.*

5. *Sharing best practices.*

6. *Actively supporting multi-institutional software projects*

7. *Work on creating a network for sharing and preserving cultural heritage both physical and digital that transcends national borders*

Comments:

The characteristics of a united library field (Q12):

1. Agreeing on a set of core values. librarians united on aiming the same future goals

2. *Visible community advocates with sound advocacy skills*

3. *Inclusive!! Being respectful of cultural issues whether collections based or community based*

4. *Cooperative, respecting each participant's contribution.*

5. *Strong, working together to achieve goals.*

6. *Quick to respond to challenges.*

7. *Sharing, of experiences, knowledge and resources. Finding ways of sharing our stories with a larger community.*

Comments:

The focus of a united library field (Q13):

1. *Building a net of empathy and knowledge of our present and its consequences to help create a better future, equal and understanding.*

2. *Clientele*

3. *Advocacy*

4. *Networking*

5. *Inclusivity*

6. *Respect*

7. *Preservation*

Comments:

A global conversation

This report is created in an interactive process, in the Women, information and libraries SIG in June 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/.