
Something for Everyone:
Public Libraries and the Information Society
Copenhagen Conference 14-15th October 1999

Proposal for
THE COPENHAGEN DECLARATION

On 14 and 15 October 1999 senior politicians and policy makers from 31 European countries met to consider the vital role of public libraries within the emerging Information Societies. Those attending the meeting heard about the key roles already played by many European public libraries in encouraging community identity, economic development, lifelong learning and cultural diversity. At the end of the meeting those present agreed the following declaration as a statement of intent for the future of public libraries across the continent of Europe.

In support of the

- UNESCO Public Library Manifesto
- IFLA Guidelines on Public Libraries
- Report on the Role of Libraries in the Modern World of the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media of the European Parliament
- European Commission's study – Public Libraries and the Information Society
- Council of Europe Cultural Committee report: Library Legislation and Policy in Europe
- IFLA statement on Freedom of Expression

We declare the following as a common basis for national and European policies regarding public libraries:

ROLES FOR THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

We support the following roles for public libraries, highlighted in the Leuven Communiqué:*)

- DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP** – Public libraries have a strategic opportunity to increase quality of life and democratic possibilities for citizens of the Information Societies by providing free and equal access to high-quality information.
- ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT** – Public libraries support the growth of communities through the provision of information services designed to meet local needs. They are important tools for reducing disparity between the information rich and the information poor citizens of Europe.
- LIFELONG LEARNING** – Public libraries provide, through their widespread distribution across Europe, a cost-effective infrastructure for lifelong learning and easy access to the content of the virtual networks. They also support students at all levels of formal education.
- CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY** – Public libraries are cultural institutions in accordance with the cultural dimension of the EU-Treaty with a great responsibility for cultural heritage, literature and literacy.

*) *The outcome of a seminar attended by public library managers from 23 countries organised by PublicA the Concerted Action for Public Libraries in Leuven (BE) on 22 August 1998 (www.croydon.gov.uk/publica/)*

ACTION BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

We call on the European Commission to support the European Parliament initiative 'The Role of Libraries in the Modern Society' by promoting practical actions to implement the recommendations of the report. These actions should stress the key role of public libraries in the emerging Information Society and the need for a European level information policy.

ACTION BY NATIONAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS

We call on all national and federal governments to take the following actions:

- 1) Prepare a national information policy for the development and co-ordination of all relevant resources, in the public interest. This policy framework will recognise the vital and unique role of public libraries as access points for the majority of citizens and be supported by suitable library legislation.
- 2) Create suitable networking infrastructure to support the development of a national information policy in the Information Age. The network infrastructure should draw together all information creating agencies, especially the traditional memory institutions (libraries, museums and archives), to encourage information sharing and the creation of joint resources. The infrastructure should also encourage practical co-operation between public libraries.
- 3) Implement a development programme for public libraries that ensure minimum standards of access to every citizen including appropriate information and communication technologies and suitable levels of investment to meet those standards. This programme should reflect the need for there to be control of developments at the level of the local community through the relevant municipality or other organisation.
- 4) Ensure that public libraries are equipped to provide maximum access to the new information resources for all citizens regardless of financial, physical or educational abilities and that those libraries have adequate resources to sustain the services over time.
- 5) Lobby the European Parliament to place public libraries high on the social agenda now and in the future.
- 6) Work to ensure that there is an equitable balance between the rights of the creators of information and the rights of citizens' access to the information that will help them to lead better lives.

ACTION BY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- 1) Be prepared to re-assess roles and resources and re-design services to respond to changing social needs.
- 2) Work towards long-term co-operation and partnership with other memory institutions and those involved with community education.
- 3) Ensure that citizens are aware of and feel able to exploit fully all the resources of the public library network by effective marketing of services to all sectors of the community.