

Moving Information Systems and the Implementation of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto: New Paradigms for Literacy

by Thelma H. Tate

Before we consider effective implementation of the new international guidelines for public libraries, it is useful to briefly assess the developments that led to the revised manifesto. A review of the literature and of conference proceedings from the last decade reflect the tremendous impact of technology on libraries and library personnel's efforts to serve the needs of their communities. Issues of equipment, communication, information dissemination, free access, technical services, and reference services are explored in many published and unpublished works (Lynch, 1993; Wiegand, 1993; Drabentstott, 1994; Rockart and Short, 1991; Ditzler, 1993; IFLA and Bookmobile Conference Proceedings, 1991-1994).

These developments occurred during the same time that local and national austerity initiatives were pressuring public library leaders to consider downsizing in order to maintain designated budgets. Concurrently, unserved populations called their needs to the attention of service providers and sought policies and laws that supported these goals of wider access for the populace. Public librarians around the world found themselves in need of strong documents to guide their work as significant leaders and contributors at the technological table of planners and users of the information superhighway.

It was against this background that UNESCO asked the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to assist in revising the 1972 Manifesto. Together with local and national documents the Manifesto would provide necessary current support for planning the future of library services to communities worldwide.

So, it was, therefore, no accident that among its medium-term goals, the IFLA Section on Public Libraries had an objective to provide a new third revision of the UNESCO Manifesto. There had been two earlier versions of this Manifesto; the 1947 edition was directed toward the general public, while the 1972 edition was aimed at professionals, and was used

to bring worldwide attention and support for public libraries. The purpose of this new edition was to summarize the key mission of public libraries in terms that had meaning for authorities.

What were some of the specific needs for the new revision of the Manifesto?

- It was in danger of becoming archaic and outmoded. The present economic context and changing attitudes spotlighted the need for a document that provided guidance and support for new ideas and emergencies in our rapidly evolving virtual environment.
- The technical environment has changed drastically and radically in the intervening years since the previous versions were adopted. Technical innovations in the field of data input, transmission, and use demanded new directives.
- The urgent need for a document to guide library personnel in planning and transforming libraries for active service in the 21st century and beyond.
- The urgent need for guidance and support in transborder understanding, communication, cooperation, networking for resource sharing and literacy.

This new version reflects professional concerns in the areas of functional literacy, information technology, continuing education, special target groups such as children, handicapped, prisoners, farmers, homeless as well as reindeer herders and trappers of the extreme north, and shepherds of Anatolia. It also reflects the views of librarians to set in motion a restatement of human rights with open access for all.

The 1994 Manifesto that was developed over a period of several years and incorporated input from the international community rejects all forms of social discrimination and confers on public libraries strong legal and social functions in the promotion of equal opportunity.

The Manifesto moves the role of libraries beyond the provision of "leisure activities" to that of information and education providers. As A. Abid (1995) of UNESCO PGI explains:

the Manifesto...distances itself not from the use of libraries for leisure purposes but from a drift toward cultural relativism which, on the pretext of wanting to cater for all forms of leisure activity, leads to a view of the public library as a place that has to be passively ever-handed. The reference to 'high quality' and the desire that the library should remain free not only of explicit forms of ideological, political or religious' censorship but also of commercial pressures are evidence of the wish to avoid such a drift. The library should no more surrender to the dictatorship of audience ratings than it should fall victim to abuses of power.

COOPERATION

The new Manifesto supports the notion that public libraries should be jointly responsible for planning and implementing needed services in conjunction with local and national authorities. The Manifesto reaffirms the need:

- to keep the principle of "free of charge services";
- for libraries to depend on existing funds rather than those taken from users—any funds taken from users in exchange for services should be used as auxiliary only and not for strategic role initiatives;
- for library planners to be part of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacy and education funded by the citizenry; and
- for the existence of public libraries to be guaranteed by law and supported with budget lines.

Such legal dimensions should ensure permanence and continuity in the activities of public libraries and promote cooperation with any organizations, institutions or firms as partners in service to the community.

THE LIBRARIAN'S ROLE

The Manifesto promotes the library staff as active intermediaries between users and resources for futuristic and strategic outlook. It:

- sees schools and libraries as keys to the doors of information superhighways that lead to a reasoned approach to knowledge;
- stresses the need for the professional and continuing education of staff on the work of educating the public to use the library resources; and
- promotes ensuring the development in the public of information and computer literacy skills for effective use of electronic resources.

CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION

Maintaining a balance between continuity and innovation for future development of public libraries, the Manifesto is based on confidence in the liberating role of knowledge that promotes freedom and progress through enlightenment; continuity in the libraries' role for culture, tolerance, understanding, mutual benefit, respect and preservation of cultures; and continuity in the desire to see the library recognized as a public institution that is essential to justice, freedom, and social cohesion. Concurrently, it provides innovations that focus on technological environment; precise explicit policies and flexibility to choose priorities, maintain standards, networks and efficiency. It lifts library staff and managers to a platform commensurate with that of authorities to which they are accountable.

BOOKMOBILES AND MOBILE LIBRARIES

What is the meaning of this Manifesto for bookmobiles/moving libraries?

With a significant portion of rural or distance inhabitants from main public libraries, moving information systems such as the bookmobile can be easily seen as the best innovations of public libraries. Possibilities for creative services are extensive.

An example of this can be seen in the Turkish library system. Between 1958 and 1963, mobile library services were provided with 5 donkeys, 3 mules, and 2 horses that carried boxes of 200 books to 36 villages in central Anatolia. Opening its first automotive bookmobile through the Tahsinaga Public Library with the support of USAID in 1963, moving library services have increased steadily. As of 1994, 77 mobile units are in

operation. There has been a 71 percent increase in the number of units put in operation in the last five years. Similarly, the number of service points or stops have increased from 36 in 1958 to 1533 in 1994. Each unit has an average registration of 1750 users for a total of 132,528 (A. Kaygusuz, *Mobile Library Services in Turkey*, IFLA Program Booklet 3, p.131).

Aghan Kaygusuz states that “mobile library services are very important for the people who live in rural or urban areas and cannot take advantage of library services.” She highlighted the 1994 Manifesto’s emphasis on the importance of mobile library services in the section which states that “the library services must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural or urban areas.” In addition, this documentation will be used to support Istanbul Municipality in its plans to open 5 mobile libraries to serve users at 100 stops in the outer regions of Istanbul in the near future (Kaygusuz, p. 132).

The 1994 UNESCO Public Library Manifesto will support two of the IFLA Round Table on Mobile Libraries Medium-Term Program objectives:

1. **Mobile Libraries International Resource Kit.** This kit will feature information about countries around the world. It will include country reports, publicity materials, slides, significant journal article citations, and a list of publications. The purpose of the Kit is to provide clearinghouse support and collections to assist mobile librarians in developing and improving services to benefit developed and developing countries.
2. **Investigation of trans-border Mobile Libraries Twinning Project.** Criteria, identification, procedures, and development of working relationships will be among the items to be considered in this project.

The Resource Kit

At the 61st Council and General Conference of IFLA, Mobile Libraries Round Table Chairperson Robert Pestell issued a public invitation and request for representatives of countries that had not already submitted a country report to plan and do so. The deadline for submitting the country report component of the kit is the fall of 1996 with an extended period to 1997 for any incomplete items. Since the announcement of the objectives to develop the Mobile Libraries International Kit, four countries have submitted country reports: Malaysia, France, Slovenia, and

Jamaica. Work is in progress in several other countries such as Greece and Turkey. Some of the questions to be addressed include: What should be included in the country report? How will information for the country report be collected? Who would be interested to participate in compiling the resources to accompany the report? Who might be recommended to prepare the report?

The Twinning Project

While it is generally accepted for librarians to improve communication, understanding and cooperation in a given region, the idea of mobile libraries in one country forming a network and working relationship with mobile libraries in another country has received less attention. The concept is similar to the idea of sister cities.

With technological advances for the 21st century, the time has arrived for librarians to consider more attentively how to support the development of their libraries through collaboration and networking across national borders.

Mirielle Fayret, a French Representative on the IFLA Round Table Executive Committee, has already developed a cooperative project between Corsican and Sardinian mobile librarians. Similar projects are underway in the Scandinavian region.

Twining should benefit both libraries and both nations. Some questions to be addressed include: Might the ALA documents on twinning be useful for mobile libraries? Is there sufficient interest to develop this idea in the United States?

CONCLUSION

In summary, one of the most significant accomplishments in public librarianship in 1995 was the widespread publication of the UNESCO Public Libraries Manifesto. It has already been translated into some of the major languages, and many other translations are underway. In view of this development, implementing the Manifesto is a priority of the highest order. It will require a commitment on the part of all who plan public library services in the United States and throughout the world.

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