



GLOBAL VISION PROJECT

Art Libraries Section Virtual Discussion Summary

10 July 2017

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

Introduction

This report summarizes responses to an Art Libraries Section call for discussion on how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. The discussion was organized as part of the IFLA Global Vision Project. Standing Committee members were invited to participate either in a group conference call or individually in writing.

Preliminaries

Q1: Please add your name to the list of participants:

Participants from the Art Libraries Standing Committee, current and incoming members, were Sandra Ludig Brooke (USA), Soledad Cánovas del Castillo (Spain), Christine Ferret (France), Ekaterina Igoshina (Russia), Elizabeth James (UK), Masako Kawaguchi (Japan), Danielle De Jager-Loftus (USA), Isabel Maringelli (Brazil), Steven Miller (Australia), Gabriela Miramontes (Mexico), Simonetta Pasqualis (Italy), Eila Rämö (Finland), Viveca Robichaud (USA), Kathleen Salomon (USA), J. Margaret Shaw (Australia), Lucile Trunel (France), Anelia Túú (Hungary). Several participants sought input from colleagues in their home institutions and countries.

Q2: How many years have you worked in libraries?

Responses ranged from 6 to 50 years, with an average of 25 years working in libraries.

Thinking about the Future

Q3. Complete the following with a brief statement: “The year is now 2022 and libraries have changed so much. They now...”

- ...have developed new, cheap and reliable technologies for storage and retrieval, as well as for presentation of collections in moving images/projections/video/multimedia. Although many more items have become available in digital format, libraries have still retained their attraction, and in fact have grown in importance, as physical places for engagement with ideas and culture and where the materiality of objects, such as books and archives, can still be enjoyed.
- ...offer more facilities for students to meet and work together with discussions between students, professors, companies and citizens taking place in a library space. We have more open access publications and commercial publishers are supporting OA publishing. Most of the material is digital, but library is still a place where you can consult non-digital items, e.g., original prints and drawings. Digital books in art and design have proper, easy to use interfaces.
- ...possess a large variety of materials in different mediums and formats, and they offer greater flexibility in their organization, adapting themselves to current needs and offering integrated services which answer the demands of an ever more plural public.
- ...are a place for discovering heritage for everyone, access free, open every day and evening, offering to admire and touch (sic!) documents, experience art, for every people of any age. People can either enjoy reading documents, viewing pictures (original and reproductions in any format), experience collaborative workshops and talks about art and its makers, past or present.
- ...need to address the problem of increasingly negative perceptions from their institutions, governments and potential clientele in the face of a deluge of information from all directions and greatly increased access to a

mass of information on line to all users. This means a greatly enhanced role not just in making information and materials available in all formats to all people, but in providing training and tools in the location, assessment and selection of information from the overwhelming mass of information available. It also means that libraries should point out that not all information is available online and, as a corollary, should create spaces and services which make access to such information readily available to all.

- ...meet nearly all reference and recreational needs via mobile technology wherever the user/reader is. However, they have also all been refurbished to meet the ever-increasing demand for physical study space, and to enable exhibition and interpretation of their historic and contemporary special collections—a requirement of their funding. They have appointed specialists to manage the unique archival and manuscript holdings that even the humblest libraries are now amassing, together with users/supporters newly enthused about such resources and their potential for research when in conjunction with digital resources.
- ...conserve and exhibit book heritage, give an opportunity of experiencing book art, and remain a source of any possible and relevant information represented in multiple forms.
- ...are spaces which focus not solely on the physical object but also in finding new and innovative ways to provide access to these resources digitally. For art libraries, the future still revolves around the physical book, at least to some degree.
- ...decide to recover some old documentary techniques for preservation: the use of acetate micro formats for some of their digital collections. They continue collaborating with their peer libraries for the open access and sharing of spaces with their local communities. The technology is not all and they have reintroduced personal support to their users.
- ...are recognized as a key component of the society. They are easily accessible and user friendly. They are comfortable, well-designed and beautiful. They are still full of books, materials, and humans whereas other places are empty or too crowded and without any people to talk with—replaced by the self-checking machine. Libraries offer free spaces, time, and relation.
- ...have many items/documents in digital format, but the role of the library is still as a gateway for information provision in this era of explosion of information communications and technology.
- ...are making more and more resources available in physical and digital format from all over the world.
- ...are places where students, professors and simple citizens meet, work, look for information, and take advantage of the many labs offered. Citizens are exposed to beauty! Beauty must be taught very early and then it becomes a lifelong value. Almost everything is digital; therefore, there is more space and money to devote to what must be kept in the original form.

A Vision for Libraries

Q4: What are the core values of libraries?

- Cultural enrichment in all its senses—a place for everybody to achieve a plenary citizenship, which includes a fine cultural background
- Free sharing of information and a core contributor to democracy
- Accessibility—open to all—in person and online
- Open-mindedness and impartiality
- Preservation of heritage
- Relevance—proactively meeting constituents' needs
- Efficient and high-quality information services
- Storehouse of information and objects irrespective of format
- Integrity—intellectual integrity
- Truth and beauty

Q5: What are libraries exceptionally good at?

- Art libraries are exceptionally good at the critical analysis, organization, and preservation of material culture artefacts and all types of visual materials
- Art libraries are exceptionally good at crossing/blurring linguistic borders/barriers
- Sharing resources directly, through other libraries, or online
- Providing relevant information
- Assisting users irrespective of who or where they are
- Organizing knowledge and ideas

- Gathering people and ideas
- Documentation and preservation—offering direct access to knowledge
- Providing free and accessible educational and cultural resources
- Mixing intellectual and practical matters
- Sustaining themselves in a great variety of places and situations
- Professional sharing of ideas and experiences

Q6: What should libraries be doing more of?

- Collectively and discerningly addressing “the conservation and preservation of our information heritage in all formats”
- Creating greater digital access to all types of material culture and visual materials
- Promoting collections and services to core users, institutions, and others
- Demonstrating their value to their communities and lobbying on behalf of libraries
- Engaging on social media platforms
- Getting out of the library—meeting users where they are, providing services and resources adapted to their needs
- Training users in efficient and effective research and assessment of information
- Training staff continuously for better management of resources
- Using volunteers within a framework of standards and in a way so that both parties benefit
- Developing better ways to track usage, and understanding how best to use this data
- Collaborating professionally
- Establishing efficient interlibrary consortiums to support the fluid exchange of knowledge
- Supporting open access publishing
- Allowing for silence—creating a contemplative and studious environment
- Cultivating creativity in the public—being open to people using our collections in innovative ways

Q7: What should libraries be doing less of?

- Dismissing their individual character—less homogenization
- Being afraid to open up to new perspectives—being judgmental of users
- Keeping to themselves—being passive, being shy, hiding in their ivory towers
- Being reactive rather than proactive—expecting patrons to find their way to us
- Failing to anticipate problems
- Being afraid of losing control
- Running after new IT systems—trying to new technological devices
- Duplicating work processes

Challenges for Libraries

Q8: What are the main challenges to society?

- Keeping up with technological change
- IT threats like hacking, viruses, identity theft, etc.
- Impact of social media and how people relate to each other—social isolation
- Fake news and fake information
- Government incompetence and irresponsibility
- Political apathy by the general population
- People’s expectations for information—they have short attention spans, lack analytical abilities, and expect immediate answers
- Environmental issues—climate change, pollution—and natural disasters
- War, terrorism, and religious violence
- Poverty, hunger, and failing economies
- International instability—emigration and the flood of refugees
- Lack of universal access to education and cultural resources
- Substance abuse

Q9: What are the main challenges to libraries?

- Maintaining relevance to society and institutions—surviving as places that are as important as museums and schools, as places for building strong and enlightened citizens
- Financial constraints—finding funding adequate to their needs
- Keeping up with technological change—how this impacts user expectations and service delivery
- Incorporating social media in library operations to stay current
- Downsizing staff and inadequate staff training
- Maintaining distinctiveness—the spread of universal culture
- Being an expert mediator between culture and public
- Leveraging our expertise as managers of cultural content to generate new knowledge in a structured way
- Keeping up with the infinite generation of electronic and printed data
- Innovation

Q10: What are your main professional challenges?

- Making my library known for its marvelous collections and services—astonishing my higher-ups, mesmerizing and engaging the public, letting my colleagues be proud of our collective work
- Keeping up with technology, how this impacts on work flow and tasks
- Doing more with the same number of staff, or with volunteers rather than paid staff
- Budget constraints that affect staffing and professional development, and collection development, processing and storage
- Paucity of data, and analysis of that data, about our collections and services
- Building cultural bridges—inserting the library into specialized, national and international networks
- Establishing respect for libraries and the profession beyond our own circles
- Attracting forward-thinking young people to become tomorrow’s committed library professionals
- Preserving our identity but being ready to change together with the changing world
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How Can a United Library Field Make a Difference?

Q11: How should a united library field meet these challenges?

- Recognize and champion the incredible variety of libraries
- Remain united while championing diversity at each step of the process
- Cultivate optimism and vision
- Emphasize collaboration and share information about a wide range of topics
- Be an active, visible party in society—make it known what we have and what we can do
- Learn constantly from experience
- Join forces for international lobbying
- Resource sharing and management of collective resources
- Cultivate a vision and a pursuit of beauty
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Q12: What should be the characteristics of a united library field?

- Embrace diversity—think of the library field as a federation of specialists rather than a monoculture
- Collaboration, cooperation, partnerships
- Strong, robust and powerful corpus
- Professionalism and expertise
- Freedom of thought and expression
- Open access and sharing of information
- Stability with flexibility
- Speed and efficiency
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Q13: What could be the focus of a united library field?

- Cultivating and conserving unique collections
- Promoting innovative uses of materials in every possible way
- Cultivating the physical witness and discovery of the treasures in our libraries
- Organizing knowledge is key

- Education is a primary goal
- Promoting standards and best practices in the protection of cultural heritage, data curation, and digital preservation
- Making libraries relevant to younger generations
- Building bridges between different kind of libraries, in different cultures, at different stages of development
- Advocating nationally and internationally for open access, open data, and intellectual freedom

This project kicked off in April 2017 with a three-day summit in Athens where the Art Libraries Section was represented by Sandra Ludig Brooke and Isabel Ayres Maringelli. Over the course of 2017-2018, IFLA will involve as many library workers worldwide as possible in this conversation. Art Libraries Section members were encouraged to continue the discussion in their own networks and organizations and to share the results with IFLA. We are looking forward to reading the IFLA Global Vision Report at the end of 2017, and to helping shape subsequent concrete strategies, processes and work programmes in 2018.

*Respectfully submitted,
Sandra Ludig Brooke*