



# GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

Report of the Library Theory and Research  
Section meeting

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

July 2017

**TOGETHER  
WE CREATE  
THE FUTURE!**

**#iflaGlobalVision**

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## Introduction

On March 30, in preparation of the Kick off meeting in Athens, and then on April 19 (at 10am and 18pm) and on July 3 2017, in the virtual space (using the platforms Zoom and Basecamp), in total 16 Standing Committee (SC) members of the Section Library Theory and Research (LTR) have participated in a conversation about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future (both outgoing and incoming SC members). They represent the LTR SC Committee and the following Areas of the World: Asia 44%, Africa 19%, Europe 19%, USA and Canada 12%, Latin America 6%.

The frame of the conversation has been the Section on Library Theory and Research specialisation which concerns with the continuing development of library and information science through theoretical and applied research in all aspects of the discipline.

## A vision for libraries

Libraries need to be viewed as change agents, agile organizations, creative/innovative enterprises and disruptors – to be recognized as expert for medias and information literacy (in a context of Fake News, post truth etc.).

When we look at the future, according to the virtual debates in the IFLA LTR Section, this means that we should advocate for the essential nature of libraries in open society, dealing with broadest range of users (compared the past) and work towards a better fit between the skills and values of LIS professionals and the managerial structures and the services within which they work.

Applying intelligent and smart technology, libraries will make resources access to better, faster, more mobile and personalized for users - trends users have become accustomed to with their personal technology.

### The core values of libraries (Q4):

<b>IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers</b>
<i>1. Facilitate access to information, promote freedom of expression and advocate for open access to information, while respecting confidentiality &amp; privacy</i>
<i>2. Support education, research &amp; lifelong learning</i>
<i>3. Provide safe/creative/engaging/open community space (third space concept)</i>
<i>4. Equality of opportunity - to overcome the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged</i>
<i>5. Collect, preserve and provide access to cultural heritage resources representing all groups within society</i>

#### Comments:

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As information organization is increasingly aided by technology, an emerging value of libraries will increasingly be filtering the quality of information and giving capability of critical thinking to users.

Libraries can give what is called a "baloney detection kit" - a set of cognitive tools and techniques that fortify the mind against penetration by falsehoods.

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## Libraries are exceptionally good at (Q5):

### IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers

1. *Information organisation, provision and preservation, to offer free access to information*
2. *Bringing people and communities together, collaboration and networking*
3. *Supporting learning and literacy*
4. *Creating a place/space and delivering services for communities*
5. *Valuing cultural artefacts and the protection, storage and maintenance of such artefacts*

#### Comments:

Libraries will continue to connect people with information and ideas, providing a place/space for conversations and thinking about learning, society and self.

## Libraries should do more of (Q6):

### IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers

1. *Giving everyone the opportunity to access information and reading opportunities*
2. *Bridging the digital divide and access to technology through information and media literacy and opportunities to learn how to use it*
3. *Providing a safe and engaging environment for individual and collaborative learning, supporting educational endeavours and learning (knowledge transfer) for all ages by providing users with the tools, spaces and processes to become informed, engaged, innovative individuals and citizens*
4. *To preserve information for future generations*
5. *To advocate for the essential nature and values of libraries in an open society*

#### Comments:

The answers varies depending on the library and community

## Libraries should do less of (Q7):

### IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers

1. *Relying on a vertical management structure*
2. *Stop being complacent and resisting change, stop relying on past practices and an outdated image (i.e. relying primarily on physical, single-point service)*
3. *Stop doing services that no longer add value and only to provide simple services (loan and reading) for the in-house users*
4. *Stop thinking themselves as out of the society and apolitical*
5. *Hiring staff who are not qualified to be professional - and not supporting staff to continue learning throughout their careers*

#### Comments:

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Libraries should stop to have as target point the traditional library focus: only to be a buyer; only to be a physical library; only to provide services for the in-house users. They should work towards a better fit between the skills and values of LIS professionals and the managerial structures within which they work.

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## Challenges and opportunities

### The main challenges to society (Q8):

IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers
1. <i>Globalisation including participative democracy; political instability and populism; terrorism and war; migration; climate change, etc.</i>
2. <i>Privacy and security of information and information systems (i.e., hacking)</i>
3. <i>To enhance education quality, lifelong learning, collaborative learning (to counteract the digital divide)</i>
4. <i>Changes in the for-profit information/publishing landscape (big conglomerates controlling news outputs)</i>
5. <i>Economic issues (i.e. inequality, disappearance of middle class, rich becoming richer and poor poorer, etc.)</i>

#### Comments:

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The complex evolution of the democratic state is characterised by a movement for greater public participation which coincides with increasing concentration of publishing and media ownership, wide access to social media, misuse of these, and an epistemic shift to a “post-truth” society. This challenge is very relevant for libraries and they have a potential underestimated role in defining fake news. Can libraries be the custodians of truth?

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### The main challenges to libraries (Q9):

IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers
1. <i>Libraries should make efforts to eliminate the digital divide and information access inequality</i>
2. <i>Preservation and curation, effective and efficient information/knowledge organisation and transfer</i>
3. <i>Create opportunities for dialogue and activities that invite participation from the community, being proactive, more cooperation</i>
4. <i>Being a true inclusive public space, participative activities and activities in medias and information literacy</i>
5. <i>Libraries should use new technology to improve their own capability and ensure staff is trained in the use of technology</i>

**Comments:**

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Libraries may need to create a counter-movement such as “slow information” – time to reflect and engage! Clearly define their value-added attributes to users (more to offer than Google and Social Media) – in particular to the younger generations.

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**The main professional challenges (Q10):**

<b>IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers</b>
<i>1. Work towards a better fit between the skills and values of LIS professionals and the managerial structures within which they work</i>
<i>2. Re-skilling and continuing professional development</i>
<i>3. Using research methods for studying what users need and want</i>
<i>4. Maintain an open dialogue with their community and collaborate with a variety of stakeholders on projects and initiatives of relevance to the community</i>
<i>5. Innovate to survive in a constantly shifting industry (i.e. how information is accessed, shared and consumed), new competitors (search engines, information providers, publishers)</i>

**Comments:**

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What is a librarian? what if he does not work in a library? There is a problem of identity of the profession. The new proactive and non-passive role is not agreed by everyone in the professional community, which instead interprets the traditional role as apolitical and isolated from the context of the institution or community of belonging.

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**How a united library field can make a difference**

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

<b>IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers</b>
<i>1. To place the library in the process of social changes by becoming a more important part of their community</i>
<i>2. Clearly define their purpose as safe physical and/or virtual places that can act as a counterpoint to users’ busy connected lives (i.e. place of reflection, introspection and integration)</i>
<i>3. By moving beyond being simply a point of access to information, but repackaging and creating information and helping user to use information effectively and efficiently</i>
<i>4. Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders</i>
<i>5. Helping librarians to use theory, critical approaches and applied research to build their activities with a strong link to the society, by raising the educational level of library staff - and ensuring their ongoing development</i>

**Comments:**

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Libraries can provide a good counterpoint for underrepresented voices and ideas and a less-biased choice of information than the Google algorithm and recommender systems.

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**The characteristics of a united library field (Q12):**

IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers
<i>1. Activities that promote literacy and reading enjoyment</i>
<i>2. Activities that address needs of various age/cultural/economic groups in the community</i>
<i>3. Activities that exposes users to multiple perspectives and ways of thinking</i>
<i>4. Activities that allow individuals to connect and learn from others</i>
<i>5. Activities that are bold and forward thinking (i.e. take risks, experiment) yet grounded in UX data</i>

**Comments:**

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Libraries should work for all actual and potential users using the new channel of delivery of services: Internet and networking

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**The focus of a united library field (Q13):**

IFLA Library Theory and Research (LTR) Standing Committee members answers
<i>1. To have well trained human resources</i>
<i>2. To develop a profession with shared values</i>
<i>3. To be recognized as expert for medias and information literacy</i>
<i>4. New partnership, participatory approach, inclusiveness, empowering users</i>
<i>5. Supporting open access, collect, manage and provide access to trusted information</i>

**Comments:**

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Libraries dealing with broadest range of users (compared to the past). Having a responsive library programs that assess changes and evolve using shorter program evaluation cycles.

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**Ideas:**

LTR members have discussed the following SWOT analysis which highlights internal and external forces that favor or obstacle the transformation of libraries and which must be considered to achieve the common vision of the future.

	Positive	Negative
<b>Internal causes</b>	<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <p><b>LIBRARIANS:</b> To have well trained human resources, to develop a profession with shared values, to ensure staff have the necessary skills to provide the services needed to meet their clients' needs, to be able to identify the real needs of the users, to update LIS curricula;</p> <p>To be recognized as expert for medias and information literacy (in a context of Fake News, etc.);</p> <p>To work towards a better fit between the skills and values of LIS professionals and the managerial structures within which they work.</p> <p><b>USER:</b> Libraries dealing with broadest range of users (compared to the past). New partnership, participatory approach, inclusiveness, empowering users, bringing people and communities together.</p> <p><b>ACCESS:</b> Freedom of access to information, supporting open access, collect, manage and provide access to trusted information relevant to the community, bridging digital divide</p> <p><b>COLLECTION:</b> Preservation and curation, effective and efficient information/knowledge organisation, valuing cultural history</p>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <p><b>LIBRARIANS:</b> Hiring staff who are not qualified to be professional - and not supporting staff to continue learning throughout their careers;</p> <p>Stop relying on past practices and an outdated image - libraries need to be viewed as change agents, creative/innovative enterprises and disruptors – not as guardians of knowledge. Stop only to provide simple services (loan and reading);</p> <p>Stop complaining.</p> <p><b>ADVOCACY:</b> Advocate for the essential nature of libraries in an open society: stop to be only reactive and not pro-active;</p> <p>To have as target point the traditional library focus, only to be a buyer; only to be a physical library; only to provide services for the in-house users;</p> <p>Stop doing services that no longer add value;</p> <p>Trying to be everything to everyone (need to think strategically and locally)</p> <p><b>COOPERATION:</b> Working isolated, and without continuity. Looking inward and not reaching out to potential areas of collaboration (e.g. presenting and publishing/co-publishing library related research in other conferences and journals).</p>

	<p><b>SPACE:</b> Inclusive public space, to offer safe - virtual and physical - environment (third space concept)</p> <p><b>LITERACY:</b> Capacity building, supporting literacies, creativity and innovation, fostering joy of reading, connect people with information technology</p>	
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<p><b>External causes</b></p>	<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p><b>DEMOCRACY:</b> Evolution of democracies to more participative democracy, to promote transparency and plurality, a strong and peaceful society.</p> <p><b>LEARNING:</b> Supporting lifelong learning, collaborative learning, sharing culture, higher education transformation;</p> <p>To contribute to educate people to fighting terrorism and dealing with immigration and migration problems and other challenges.</p> <p><b>ICT:</b> Intelligent and smart technology will change the library function and image;</p> <p>Making resources access better, faster, more mobile and personalized for users - trends users have become accustomed to with their personal technology;</p> <p>It's not all about the book - Libraries will continue to connect people with information and ideas and much, much more.</p> <p><b>COOPERATION:</b> Looking to potential areas of collaboration in the information sector (i.e. search engines, information providers, publishers)</p>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <p><b>SOCIETY TRANSFORMATION:</b> Political instability, inequality, terrorism, immigration and migration Climate change Globalisation.</p> <p><b>ECONOMICS:</b> Economic issues – e.g. disappearance of the middle class (developed countries) Digital divide.</p> <p><b>INFORMATION SECTOR:</b> Security of information and information systems (i.e., hacking);</p> <p>Changes in the for-profit information/publishing landscape (big conglomerates controlling news outputs) and the emergence social media as news (i.e. fake news);</p> <p>Not dealing with the rising cost of access to published materials/information and its supporting technology;</p> <p>Lack of innovation to survive in a constantly shifting industry (i.e. how information is accessed, shared and consumed); new competitors (search engines, information providers, publishers).</p>
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## A global conversation

This report is created in an interactive process, conducted virtually during April, May, June and July using various collaboration platforms for conversation and shared documents. It is part of a global conversation initiated by IFLA about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future.

Over the course of two years, between 2017 and 2018, IFLA Section LTR will continue the conversation involving the LTR members and as many librarians and others as possible in this global conversation and share the results with IFLA.