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Barcelona

Xarxa de Biblioteques
Municipals



Seminar 'New uses of the public library'

The Seminar '**New uses of the public library**', held on 26 February 2015 in the functions room of the Design Museum of Barcelona and organised by the Barcelona Provincial Council Library Services Management Office with the cooperation of the Barcelona Libraries Consortium and the IFLA's Public Libraries and Library Buildings and Equipment sections, provided a forum for debate on the **changes that are taking place in the use of the public library** and how they affect services, users, spaces and professionals.

One of the challenges currently facing library professionals is defining the library model in a global context marked by profound change and social and economic uncertainty. A constantly evolving society characterised by factors such as the increased use of technology, changes in cultural consumption, a trend towards immediate access to knowledge, a diversity of interests and multiculturalism.

These social factors are changing how citizens approach libraries and create new challenges in responding to needs and expectations in the design of library services and amenities. To address this, **three round tables** were organised on **Users, Services and Professionals** and composed, in all cases, of a local moderator, a professional from the Barcelona Municipal Libraries Network (MLN), a member of the Public Libraries section and a member of the Buildings section. The programme concluded with a presentation of good practices applied in the province of Barcelona.

The **first round table**, on the topic of the view of the **Users**, was moderated by Judit Terma, from the Barcelona Libraries Consortium, and included Jeffrey A. Scherer, the architect of Founding Principal MSR in Minneapolis (USA), Marta Granel, manager of Castelldefels Central Library and Sisdal Bech-Petersen, from the Aarhus Library, in Denmark.

The three experiences presented showed the need for libraries in line with the most immediate reality and for this to happen, they must be opened to **community participation**. The examples contributed to the discussion showed participation models from different areas of library management, from defining the architectural project to configuring programmes of services and/or activities.

As regards the building design phase, Jeffrey Scherer highlighted the changes that have taken place in work methods and the progressive inclusion of the users' and the non-expert community's opinions in order to build facilities more closely matched to the needs of the territory. The input from non-experts has multiplied the democratising effect in decision-making regarding public spaces targeting the community.

Drawing from his own experience, he outlined how professionals can ensure that users' input contributes value to the definition of the public library:

- generate trust
- engage the entire community without prejudging
- show empathy for all inputs
- be able to explain/communicate the problems and/or limitations we are currently facing
- not be afraid to question the more problematic aspects
- listen to everyone
- not try to convince.

The opinions expressed during a participation process must be relevant to the community's real needs. He also pointed out that debate and participation, beyond enhancing the definition of the library, strengthens ties or connections with the community, while also improving mutual understanding between the different population groups.

Castelldefels library advocated integrating the library within the community by **programming activities**, a new example of engagement with the population, in the library model. In this case, through cooperation with local talent and the associative, business and economic fabric.

The library as a space is opened to the community, with the goal of becoming a cultural hub for the population. The library goes beyond its physical walls, moving into the street and engaging the town's entities, associations and companies in its development. This engagement with the territory's fabric enables the library to present itself as a centre for creation, experimentation, inspiration and interrelation, reaffirming its role at the service of citizens. The library's manager highlighted the ability to adapt and transform spaces to the needs of the programme of activities.

The next step for Castelldefels was to go beyond programming activities and integrate the citizen's vision in the definition of the library's strategic lines, with the goal of making this engagement equally evident in the provision of other services.

Sidel Bech-Petersen from Aarhus presented her professional experience based on the use of the '**Design thinking**' method, a people-focused design methodology. When applied to libraries, it provides a way of working that

enables services, spaces and experiences to be thought up and designed with people at the heart of the process and involving the community.

The system for applying this method is structured in three defined phases which could be summarised as follows:

1. Go out to the world and learn from it
2. Brainstorm
3. Develop the idea and test it

On the basis of the experience of libraries that have applied this methodology, the recommendations would be:

- to think more in terms of behaviours than of statistical data;
- to not think only in terms of large-scale processes, it can also be applied to day-to-day operations;
- to learn from the failures and the services that don't work;
- it is not necessarily related to creating a new service. A new way of presenting an existing service is an innovation too.

As an aggregate reflection on all the contributions made, she highlighted the responsibility to understand, observe, listen and integrate the community's real needs. In short, to design within the public framework, taking into account people's opinions and the uses that will be made of the facilities.

The **second round table discussion** dealt with the provision of **library services** and how they are affected by the heterogeneous uses that users make of and demand from the public library. Moderated by Ferran Burguillos, manager of the Vapor Badia library in Sabadell, there were contributions by Silvia Barragán, manager of the Antoni Comas library in Mataró, Karen Latimer, librarian at Queen's University in Belfast, and Jonna Holmgaard from the Danish Agency for Culture.

Based on the experience at Mataró and following on from the previous round table, the manager stressed the importance for each organisation/library of knowing its catchment area and being aware of this area's reality, so that physical spaces are created that foster a sense of belonging, creativity, interrelation, experimentation, learning and knowledge, with four basic ingredients: the staff, the collection, the spaces and networking.

She highlighted three basic pillars to be taken into account in the provision of library services: **social cohesion, digital inclusion and participation**. As regards social cohesion, the public library becomes a third space, open to everyone and a facilitator of interactions between social groups. It fosters activities that promote dialogue, interrelation, criticism and identity to enhance its value in society. Cohesion strategies are encompassed within the library's fields of action, such as fostering reading, access to information or life-long learning.

Digital inclusion supports the library's quest to offer a reverse model based on interfaces, resources and activities aimed at promoting information literacy and not just providing access to hardware and software.

The third pillar, participation, focuses on the diversity of uses made of the facilities and their multifunctionality. It evokes the emotional and life experiences provided by libraries and the effects these may have on individuals. She stressed library managers' and professionals' disposition and character as a decisive factor in designing a participative, collaborative model and in seeking participation channels.

Complementing and bridging these basic pillars, she also mentioned concepts used in the design of library services, such as collections becoming connections, local space, proximity culture, innovation and the ability, in spite of the limitations, to adjust and adapt these concepts.

Karen Latimer began her presentation by drawing attention to the similarities between public libraries and other typologies such as universities, where the dominating trends are also designing user-focused services, **interaction between connections** (resources-users-professionals), and the spaces' multifunctionality.

She saw libraries as hybrid spaces and, beyond being a characteristically third place (leisure), they share features with the other two places: the first place (the home environment, privacy) and the second place (the job environment, work). She also outlined the challenges that had to be addressed:

- building type
- future projection with respect to ICT
- sustainability
- search for partnerships
- space for electronic resources
- options for citizen participation

As head of the *Model Programme for Public Libraries* in Denmark, Jonna Holmgaard presented the project consisting of a catalogue of tools on the interaction between spaces and functions to inspire library designers and offer ideas and good practices for functional programmes.

Reflecting the changes taking place in modern society, the goal pursued by the programme was to promote the library as a public space that addresses challenges that can be translated into the following concepts:

- 'from collection to connection',
- 'from book containers to community centres', and,
- 'from transaction to relationship'.

The programme's conceptual starting point is that these challenges are similar, on a worldwide scale, in all libraries. It has been chosen to offer a

flexible programme that provides general specifications for new libraries and redesign proposals for existing libraries.

Two examples were given: the first, focused on the library as a space for inspiration, where the opportunity is to find out how the library caters for new and experienced users in the fields of art, cinema, literature, music, entertainment, etc. And the second, focused on the library as an urban space, where the opportunity is to create places that make people want to enter them and the cohesion between the library and the urban space.

Finally, she invited the attendees to visit the programme's website (<http://modelprogrammer.kulturstyrelsen.dk/en>) where they can find templates for new cases and opportunities.

The **third round table: 'The professionals'** was moderated by Cristòbal Urbano, professor of Library Science at Barcelona University, accompanied by Lluís Salvador, Human Resources Manager at the Barcelona Libraries Consortium, Marian Morgan-Bindon, who gave the presentation prepared by Pirkko Lindberg, director of Tampere's libraries, and Sharon L. Bostick from the Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

The three experiences presented addressed the professionals' functions in the provision of library services, how library spaces must be designed to foster greater proximity to users and make it easier to work across functions.

With respect to the **qualities that future professionals must have**, the Finnish presentation stressed that they must be: creative, flexible, extroverted, endowed with social skills, able to work in a team, adapt to changes and computer literate. It was forecast that professionals would become increasingly specialised (youth, social services ...), jobs would become multi-professional, and continuous professional training would continue to be essential.

It was also forecast that the smaller libraries would focus on target groups. One example would be [Library 10](#) focused on young people. The boundaries between different library typologies would become blurred and the different professional profiles would merge.

Professionals would have a mixed function, with highly differentiated roles such as producer, connector, trainer, student ... but it highlighted the importance of daring to try new things and not be afraid to make mistakes.

When asked what shape the continuous training of these professionals should take, Marian Morgan-Bindon pointed out that professional development should be tied to the commitment to put libraries at the core of the communities they operate in. In the Gold Coast (Australia) libraries, the programme is focused on skill development, with a broad range of specialisations to choose from, but also on the recognition of people who do not have an official

qualification. As part of the performance assessment, it must be shown that the skill has been acquired and can also be conveyed.

Lluís Salvador from Barcelona Libraries maintained that staff **specialisation** could be one of the tools that can help us adapt to changes in trends. He particularly highlighted specialisations in: digital services, children, cultural dynamization ... also the inclusion of other professionals in a network, such as marketing experts, systems engineers, social educators, mentors. Networking and cooperation are vitally important, particularly for smaller libraries.

He mentioned **cross-functional skills**, stating that right now they are more important than technical skills:

- relational skills, the ability to effectively manage personal relationships (professionals, users, associates). Empathy is essential.
- adaptation to change and flexibility
- the ability and the courage to innovate.

At present, there is a contradiction between jobs, qualifications, abilities... One of the challenges will be to see how these skills are integrated in job selection and training. Horizontal specialisation systems need to be created. It will also be necessary to address work relationships from an innovative stance. Human resources management tools are not designed for change but for stability.

Sharon L. Bostick Dean advocated designing **work areas** that meet professionals' requirements and the need to be able to make changes in such areas. Smaller counters are needed that are not intimidating to users, the staff must move around the library, interact with users and foster proximity.

An ongoing assessment must be established to measure to what extent what is being done satisfies users' needs and how the staff's lives are improved. It is also necessary to assess how the staff behave at work and find other ways to assess the use made by the staff of the library.

On the subject of Good Practices, Ester Omella, head of the Library Services Management Office's Programming, Assessment and Quality section, presented six experiences within the Barcelona Municipal Libraries Network related to the areas discussed in the previous round tables.

On the subject of professionals, Montse Álvarez, from the Library Services Management Office, and Ferran Agelet, from Barcelona Libraries, gave two presentations that focused on strategies that organisations can use to leverage their knowledge, referring specifically to organisations that learn from themselves and use the know-how generated within the institution to innovate.

On the subject of digital services, Núria Pi, from the Library Services Management Office, presented a proposal related to mobile services, and

Anna Bröll, from Barcelona Libraries, explained how Barcelona Libraries went about training in digital skills.

On the subject of library architecture, Santi Romero, from the Library Services Management Office, and Rodrigo Alaminos, from Martorell Town Council, and in this case also the architect responsible for the project, gave a practical example of genuine dialogue in the consultation process for construction of a library, applied to Martorell library.

In the conclusions, common areas or **strategies** that were present in all three of the programme's round tables were identified and shared, in the Seminar's closing address, by Marta Cano, head of the coordination department at Barcelona Provincial Council's Library Services Management Office.

There is agreement in defining the library as a common place; it is a first, second and third place. A place for connecting and for connections, and an emotional and life experience that can be life-changing. In order to match libraries more closely to the territory's needs, the following proposals could be developed:

1. Become **knowledgeable about immediate reality**: go out into the street, learn from life, observe behaviours, be inquisitive, ... We must be close to the community: local reality must be the library's driver.
2. Integrate **participation** as a work attitude: listen without constraints, without trying to convince and without prejudging. Communication with the user must be perceived as an ongoing dialogue.
3. **Trust**: in the team, the user and ourselves, innovating, taking risks ... without being afraid to make mistakes. Learn from failure.
4. **Flexibility**: this has been a recurring concept in different areas of debate. In designing the library as a space to be used, stressing that the space must not be an excuse for not making decisions. Existing spaces must be redesigned to give them new uses and new specificities. From the professional viewpoint, flexibility to adapt to constant change; a mixed professional profile is needed—producer, connector. Flexibility too in the professionals' continuous training; what we do today will change tomorrow.
5. **Cooperation**: creating alliances as a working system, while also being aware that these alliances will depend to a great extent on the local context. Cooperation is also an essential element for smaller centres and to guide the work teams. As a professional group, we must be able to integrate other professions and form multidisciplinary teams.

6. Give priority to **experimentation**, choosing the most appropriate services for our area, focusing on what we are good at.
7. **Connection:** Connection versus collection, professionals connected with each other. Professionals connected with users and resources.
8. Be creative, flexible, with **social skills**, be good at teamwork, acquire leadership and computer skills, a broad general knowledge, outgoing personality.

We must fall in love ... with libraries and users.

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Carme Rodríguez
Rapporteurs

Barcelona, 12 March 2015