



International Federation of
Library Associations and Institutions



Manifesto approved
by the 35th session of
the General Conference
of UNESCO

IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto

The Multicultural Library – a gateway to a cultural diverse society in dialogue

All people live in an increasingly heterogeneous society. There are more than 6,000 different languages in the world. The international migration rate is growing every year resulting in an increasing number of people with complex identities. Globalization, increased migration, faster communication, ease of transportation and other 21st century forces have increased cultural diversity in many nations where it might not have previously existed or has augmented the existing multicultural makeup.

“Cultural Diversity” or “Multiculturalism” refers to the harmonious co-existence and interaction of different cultures, where “culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature; lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”.¹ Cultural diversity or multiculturalism is the foundation of our collective strength in our local communities and in our global society.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is the common heritage of humankind and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all. It is a source for the exchange, innovation, creativity, and peaceful coexistence among peoples. “Respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security”.² Therefore, libraries of all types should reflect, support and promote cultural and linguistic diversity at the international, national, and local levels, and thus work for cross-cultural dialogue and active citizenship.

As libraries serve diverse interests and communities, they function as learning, cultural, and information centres. In addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, library services are driven by their commitment to the principles of fundamental freedoms and equity of access to information and knowledge for all, in the respect of cultural identity and values.

1 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001.

2 *ibid*

Principles

Each individual in our global society has the right to a full range of library and information services. In addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, libraries should:

- serve all members of the community without discrimination based on cultural and linguistic heritage;
- provide information in appropriate languages and scripts;
- give access to a broad range of materials and services reflecting all communities and needs;
- employ staff to reflect the diversity of the community, who are trained to work with and serve diverse communities.

Library and information services in a culturally and linguistically diverse context include both the provision of services to all types of library users and the provision of library services specifically targeted to underserved cultural and linguistic groups. Special attention should be paid to groups which are often marginalized in culturally diverse societies: minorities, asylum seekers and refugees, residents with a temporary residence permit, migrant workers, and indigenous communities.

Missions of multicultural library services

In a culturally diverse society focus should be on the following key missions, which relate to information, literacy, education and culture:

- promoting awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and fostering cultural dialogue;
- encouraging linguistic diversity and respect for the mother tongue;
- facilitating the harmonious coexistence of several languages, including learning of several languages from an early age;
- safeguarding linguistic and cultural heritage and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in all relevant languages;
- supporting the preservation of oral tradition and intangible cultural heritage;
- supporting inclusion and participation of persons and groups from all diverse cultural backgrounds;
- encouraging information literacy in the digital age, and the mastering of information and communication technologies;
- promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace;
- encouraging universal access to cyberspace; supporting the exchange of knowledge and best practices with regard to cultural pluralism.

Management and operation

The multicultural library expects all types of libraries to adopt an integrated service approach. The core activities of library and information services for culturally and linguistically diverse communities are central, not “separate” or “additional”, and should always be designed to meet local or specific needs.

The library should have a policy and a strategic plan, defining its mission, objectives, priorities and services related to cultural diversity. The plan should be based on a comprehensive user needs analysis and adequate resources.

Library activities should not be developed in isolation. Cooperation with relevant user groups and professionals at local, national or international level should be encouraged.

Core actions

The multicultural library should:

- develop culturally diverse and multilingual collections and services, including digital and multimedia resources;
- allocate resources for the preservation of cultural expression and heritage, paying particular attention to oral, indigenous and intangible cultural heritage;
- include programmes supporting user education, information literacy skills, newcomer resources, cultural heritage and cross-cultural dialogue as integral parts of the services;
- provide access to library resources in appropriate languages through information organization and access systems;
- develop marketing and outreach materials in appropriate media and languages to attract different groups to the library.

Staff

The library staff is the active intermediary between users and resources. Professional education and continuing training focused on services to multicultural communities, crosscultural communication and sensitivity, anti-discrimination, cultures and languages should be provided.

The staff of a multicultural library should reflect the cultural and linguistic characteristic of the community to ensure cultural awareness, reflect the community the library serves, and encourage communication.

Funding, legislation and networks

Governments and other relevant decision-making bodies are urged to establish and adequately fund libraries and library systems to offer free library and information services to culturally diverse communities.

Multicultural library services are in essence global. All libraries involved in activities in this field must participate in relevant local, national or international networks in policy development. Research is needed to obtain the data necessary to make informed service decisions and secure appropriate funding. Research findings and best practices should be widely disseminated in order to guide effective multicultural library services.

Implementing the Manifesto

The international community must recognize and support libraries and information services in their role of promoting and preserving cultural and linguistic diversity.

Decision makers at all levels and the library community around the world are hereby requested to disseminate this Manifesto and to carry out the principles and actions expressed herein.