IFLA TREND REPORT 2019 UPDATE

Our societies are facing unprecedented uncertainty and complexity. To respond, information and the libraries that give access to this are more vital than ever before.

INSIGHTS FROM THE

IFLA TREND REPORT

IFLA is the Global Voice of the Library and Information Profession

IFLA puts libraries on the global stage and helps them develop.

We are the global voice and the largest brains trust of the library and information profession, with an active network of more than 1,500 Members – leading institutions and players in the library field – in over 150 countries, and well-established relations with the UN and other international organisations.

Together with our Members we work to set the professional agenda and develop standards in library service provision, to improve access to information and cultural heritage resources, and to place this work at the heart of local, national and global policies.

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Trend Report updates are available for 2016, 2017 and 2018

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WHAT IS THE IFLA TREND REPORT?

The IFLA Trend Report is the result of the dialogue between the library field and experts from a range of disciplines.

By crossing experience and perspectives, it provides an opportunity to explore and discuss the emerging trends that are shaping the world in which libraries work. It is not a static report, but a dynamic and evolving set of online resources for library and information professionals. The Trend Report website – trends.ifla.org – offers a range of data and information for libraries to use, share and build on, including a bibliography and literature review of existing trend reports, expert papers and discussion summaries.

The original IFLA Trend Report identified five high level trends in the global information environment, spanning access to information, education, privacy, civic engagement and technological transformation. It does not seek to predict the future, but rather to explore the forces that will influence it. Subsequent updates have continued in this line by opening up new paths and questions for reflection.

It is intended as a starting point – a catalyst – for discussion both within the library field, and when talking with external partners. It is a support for thinking on how best to prepare for what is to come, so that libraries do not only survive, but thrive.

That is where you come in. How libraries respond to – or take advantage of – these trends will have a decisive influence on how big a role our institutions will play in the new information landscape. This is perhaps the most urgent question facing the profession today.

We encourage you to use the IFLA Trend Report Update to organise and facilitate creative workshops with your community, network, colleagues or staff. Stay tuned to news from IFLA at www.ifla.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter!
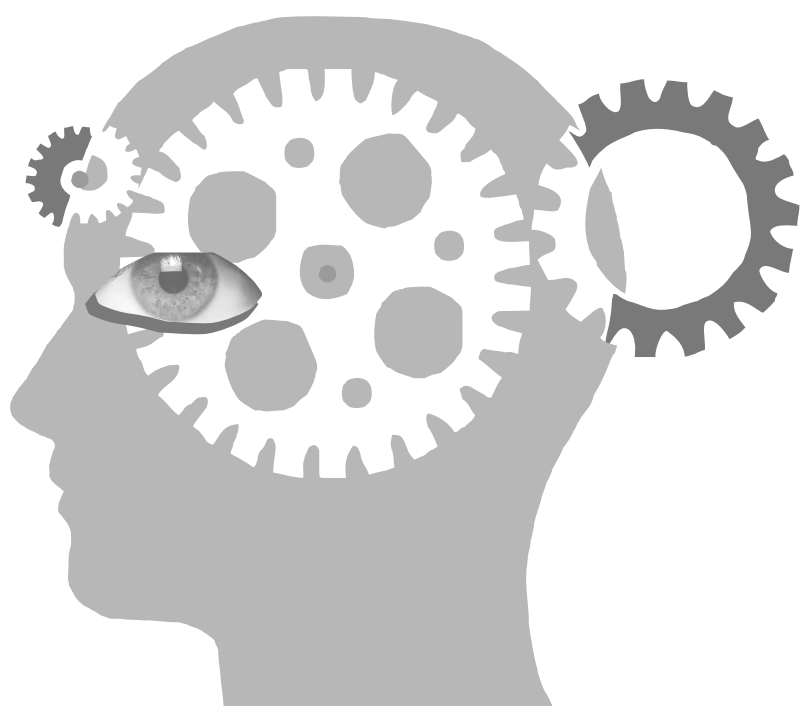
Foreword – Glòria Pérez-Salmerón,
IFLA President 2017 - 2019

As institutions with a mission to serve communities, and an ongoing obligation to show it, libraries need to be aware of, and respond to trends.

In the two years I spent as IFLA President, I saw so many great examples of libraries not only keeping up with change in the world around them, but staying ahead of it. There is so much passion and inventiveness in our field, and so much potential – it is not a surprise that libraries have repeatedly proven wrong those who have predicted our demise.

This is, however, an ongoing effort. That passion and inventiveness is as necessary as ever, alongside a commitment to fulfilling our timeless mission of providing equitable access to information, powering literate, informed and participatory societies.

The 2019 IFLA Trend Report Update draws on the contributions of speakers at the President's Session at the 2019 World Library and Information Congress, held in Athens. I loved having the opportunity to share lessons and examples from colleagues around the world, from Buenos Aires to Beirut and from Suva to Vancouver.

With this report, I hope even more of you will be able to benefit from these insights, and what they tell us about how we can ensure that libraries continue to be drivers of empowerment for all.

Happy reading!

Foreword – Christine Mackenzie,
IFLA President 2019 - 2021

I have had the luck to take on the presidency of IFLA at an exciting time.

Thanks to the Global Vision, our field has a new sense of shared values and a Strategy for 2019-24. Thanks to the ongoing review of our governance, we will soon have structures with new possibilities for library and information workers around the world to engage.

Yet even with this in place, we will not be able to rest. Having been closely involved in the original IFLA Trend Report in 2013, I am strongly aware that there is a constant need to look at the world around us, reflect on how they impact on our field, and work together to react.

This year's report continues in the tradition of the most recent updates, sharing short insights into developments that call for a response from libraries, either in order to mitigate risks or to seize new opportunities. I am grateful to my predecessor, Glòria Pérez-Salmerón, for bringing together such a great range of speakers at her session at the 2019 World Library and Information Congress, whose ideas have provided the basis for each chapter.

Next year's Trend Report will offer a complete update of the 2013 original. I am looking forward to gathering and crossing the perspectives of key experts from around the world and across areas of experience and expertise.

It will be an exciting process – watch this space!

Introduction – Gerald Leitner, IFLA Secretary General

IFLA's original Trend Report in 2013 was designed as both a source of inspiration and a practical tool for the global library field.

Using IFLA's unique convening power, it was possible to gather insights and perspectives from a series of experts in different fields in order to build awareness among libraries of the key evolutions in the world in which we exist.

They highlighted a range of developments in the way we learn, work, communicate and even define ourselves and our identities that in turn shape how libraries can best fulfil their missions. This fits well with a key goal of IFLA's current Strategy – to inform and inspire the field as a key step towards empowering it to face the future.

The 2019 Trend Report Update continues on from the original, adding to the body of insights and experience available to libraries when thinking about what is to come. Following the model and objectives of the original, the aim is to provide a starting point for discussion and reflection, this time based on the contributions of the speakers at the President's Session held on 26 August 2019 at the IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Athens.

As such, it benefits from the knowledge and understanding of library and information professionals from around the world. These contributions offer insights into three key trends:

1. Dealing with Uncertainty: so much of what used to seem sure is so no longer. Changing circumstances are obliging governments, libraries and individuals to reassess assumptions in order to deal with the unfamiliar. For libraries, this can mean a greater need to advocate in order to secure support, but also means that people need information more than ever. These changes can be a source of stress and tension, but through dialogue, we can build understanding of the new situation we face and arrive at solutions.

2. Adopting Holistic Approaches: growing awareness of the interrelation between different aspects of our lives at the individual level, and between different policy areas at a large scale have made it possible to see just how complicated the world really is. In order to make progress, we need to be readier to take holistic approaches. For individuals – including library and information workers – this means taking account of everything that affects how effectively people seek information and learn. For governments, cross-cutting initiatives such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda provide a model.

3. Working at Scale: technology has made it easier to work at a regional or even global scale than ever before. Certainly, the challenges we face also require large-scale responses, but it is not always easy to think or to act beyond the local level. What does this mean for how libraries work, and what they can achieve, both in their efforts to enhance professional practice, and to win support from decision-makers? What is necessary to make this sort of large-scale cooperation into an instinct for libraries?

IFLA is grateful to all those who spoke at the President's Session for their insights: Randa Chidiac, Maria Angélica Fuentes, Catharina Isberg, Deborah Jacobs, Mandla Ntombela, Lorin Pai, Sonia Poulin, Alejandro Santa and Antoine Torrens.

1 Dealing with Uncertainty

1a) We can no longer count on the support of governments: Advocacy is the answer

Based on the Intervention of Maria Angelica Fuentes, President of the Association of Chilean Librarians, Chile

The last few decades have seen a major change, in many countries, in the way that governments think about the way they run their countries. Pressures on social security systems, questions about the effectiveness of traditional government policies, and changes in human behaviour have all forced those in power to think about how they wield it.

Beyond the changes linked to evolutions in how we live, work, and relate to each other, many countries have also faced pressures from outside – notably from lenders – to make serious cuts in order to meet debt and deficit targets. Governments around the world have therefore looked to reassess their approach, and sometimes turn away from policies which have been in place for decades.

The result for public services is uncertainty. That their work can continue in its current form, with its current level of funding, from current sources, is no longer sure. Even those which make an undoubted contribution to well-being, such as health, may be forced to rely more on private funding, or take place under private operators.

Libraries are not spared in this situation. In order to maintain the support of those who take decisions about funding, they need to be able to show what they contribute. Assumptions that the internet removes the need for other reliable sources of information, that there is no need to promote reading, or that a market-based strategy will be enough, all risk leading to damaging choices.

Libraries have to be able to show that they are not a nice-to-have, but a need-to-have, an investment in the future of the communities they serve, be they towns or villages, universities, institutions, or countries as a whole.
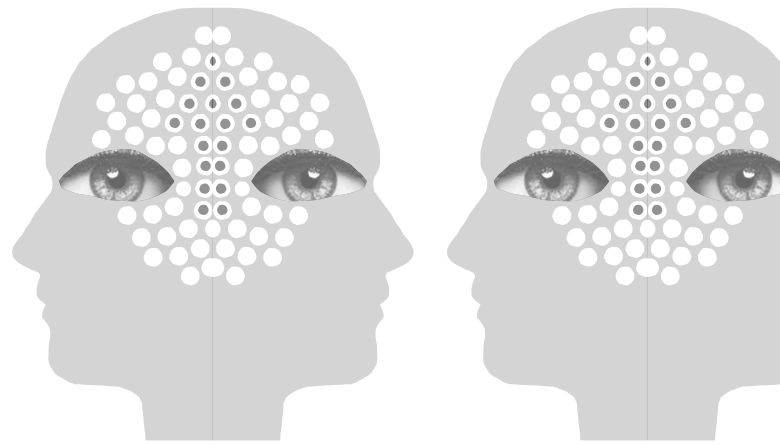
The job is made harder by the fact that libraries help in such a wide range of ways. It is relatively easy to focus on what schools do – education – or hospitals – making people better. However, the support that libraries provide is far more diverse, offering support to policies for culture, research, democratic participation, community building, and life-long learning amongst other things. It is also more diffuse, making important, but often hard-to-measure contributions alongside other interventions. Getting decision-makers to understand and value this is not always easy.

To do so will require advocacy. Despite the stereotype of libraries and librarians as quiet and unassuming, there is a pressing need to affirm our values and show the need for our work. We need to find ways to demonstrate what we bring – or the costs of our absence – across the board, making libraries into a cross-cutting priority.

We will need to be persistent. Governments rise and fall, and the contacts we build up with one administration can easily change, leaving us back where we started.

We will also need to be smart. We need to develop skills and leadership in promoting the work of libraries. We also have to get stronger at developing ways of measuring the impact of what we are doing, both in hard numbers, but also in stories, anecdotes and qualitative evidence that speak to different parts of policy-makers' brains. Indeed, this can be an opportunity to discover the full richness of what libraries can provide.

In short, while no longer being able to count on the support of governments may not be comfortable, it gives our field a great opportunity to rediscover and reaffirm what we can contribute.

1b) Policy complexity is increasing the pressure on individuals to take the right decisions: Libraries can help!

Based on the Intervention of Sonia Poulin, Executive Director and CEO, Justice Education Society, Canada

Government is about a series of choices. In deciding what to do (at least when acting responsibly), those in power use as much information as possible to assess the benefits and costs of different approaches.

Of course, politics have a role to play. There are always preferences, and democracy relies on the possibility to pursue these. However, their application needs to be based on evidence, and should be applied transparently. This is essential if parliamentarians and others are to be able to engage and for citizens to hold governments to account later.

Yet the volume of information available to governments and parliaments nowadays also serves to highlight the complexity of the challenges they face.

On the positive side, this helps build understanding of the connections between issues, and of the effects that actions or evolutions in one area may have on what happens elsewhere. It helps prevent making mistakes through over-simplification, or avoid unexpected side-effects.

> *WHEN PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW ABOUT THE RIGHTS THEY HAVE UNDER LAW, OR THE SCHEMES AND PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE TO THEM, THEY CANNOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM.*

However, it can also be daunting when there are so many things that need to be taken into account when trying to work out what policies to adopt. Indeed, there are even economists who suggest that complicated feedback loops and responses may make any action useless.

This is likely an overly pessimistic view of the effectiveness of government action, but underlines that, in the end, it is how individuals themselves respond to the laws, policies and structures they face that determines how effective they are.

In this, information once again plays a role. When people do not know about the rights they have under law, or the schemes and programmes available to them, they cannot take advantage of them. Given that a single national – or even local – policy cannot target people individually, there is a need for people themselves to have the information they need to get the best out of what is on offer.

Furthermore,there is the role of information in enabling people to play their role as citizens, engaging in and influencing policy, as championed by initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership.

Yet simply being able to get hold of information does not mean that it can be used effectively. Just as governments and parliaments face complexity, so too do individuals, and potentially even more so. They too risk being left lost, discouraged, or simply left out.

This is an area where libraries, and all those who are invested in supporting informed citizens and informed societies, come into play. This is not the role of just one type of library, but rather a situation where public, law, research and national libraries can all play a role, through their collections, their expertise, and the unique relationships that they have with individuals. This potential can be expanded still further through collaboration with other actors involved in producing and providing information.

Collaboration between these types of libraries can offer both the information and skills needed for decision-making in a complex world. The work of IFLA's Law Libraries Section, in particular workshops held in different parts of the world, is encouraging the creation of these connections and services, providing an infrastructure to help individuals deal with complexity and take better decisions.
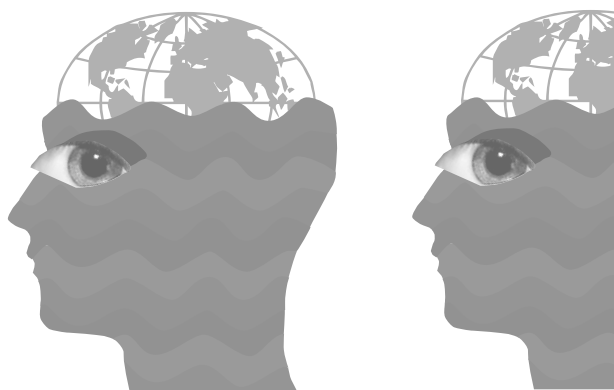
1c) Library and information workers are facing uncertainty about the future: We can best address it through dialogue

Based on the intervention of Lorin Pai, Librarian Reserve Bank of Fiji, Fiji

With change inevitably comes uncertainty. Those affected face a new reality where previous assumptions may not apply, forcing them to reconsider and reassess their actions and thinking. At an individual level, this can be psychologically difficult, forcing people to move outside of their comfort zones.

Beyond this, change can also impact on the relationship between people and between communities. New possibilities risk leading to struggles to capture gains, while reduced resources create tougher competition. Where there is the sense of a fight for survival, cooperation – and all of the benefits that it brings – can risk breaking down.

> " *LIBRARIES HAVE LONG OUTLIVED THE PREDICTIONS OF THEIR DEMISE THAT WERE COMMON IN THE 1990S AND 2000S, BUT THIS HAS NOT MEANT THAT THE PRESSURE IS OFF, OR THAT THE NEED TO FIND NEW WAYS FORWARDS HAS GONE AWAY.*

The same applies within workplaces as missions and individual roles change, in response both to the evolving requirements of users and demands of funders. People may have to adapt to new structures and develop new skills, all while feeling pressure on performance and budgets.

Of course, many of the changes faced may be shared, from tighter budgets to a greater risk of disaster linked to climate change. Yet just at a time when the need for – and potential gain from – cooperation is greatest, the strain on professional connections can also be highest. Special effort is therefore needed to ensure a desire, and readiness, to work together.

This is particularly true for libraries, which have both seen a major increase in the understanding of the importance of information and the skills to use it, but also a hugely changed environment in which to deliver services. Libraries have long outlived the predictions of their demise that were common in the 1990s and

2000s, but this has not meant that the pressure is off, or that the need to find new ways forwards has gone away.

This is where dialogue can come in. In the Pacific, the concept of 'Talanoa' offers a means of doing this. Already adopted in the context of discussions about how to respond to climate change, this focuses on encouraging stakeholders to share stories. Crucially, this should not happen in a confrontational or accusatory way, but rather be based on personal experiences.

In parallel, this approach also looks to foster a sense of curiosity about difference and about the future, promoting an open mind and readiness to learn. When other people are seen as potential sources of great ideas, this also facilitates interaction.

Through this, the goal is to build an understanding of the situations faced, and how they are affecting people, as a starting point to developing solutions based on empathy and respect for all. Furthermore, with the possibility to imagine yourself in the place of others, it is then possible to work with them to find solutions.

This was the experience of the Pacific librarians who have taken part in the INELI (International Network of Emerging Library Innovators) programme, who had the opportunity to practice Talanoa across cultures and distances.

This has been successful in building a sense of curiosity, not just in the work of colleagues, but also in the future itself. In turn, this has ensured that libraries in the region are better able to face changes, not under stress, but with confidence.

2 Adopting Holistic Approaches

2a) People need holistic services, across fields and throughout life: Libraries provide this

Based on the intervention of Antoine Torrens-Montebello, Director, City Libraries of Compiègne, France

What makes for a great service? How is it possible, either for money or out of public duty, to work best and most effectively with individuals and groups? It's a question that has kept managers and thinkers busy across sectors, around the world, for centuries.

Plenty has been written, plenty has been tried out in order to respond to the specific needs of the individual, in a way that works for them.

The rise of the internet has accelerated this drive towards personalisation. In effect, rather than simply promoting generic services in line with the priorities of the service provider, the aim is to make the customer more central, and through this, bring them towards whatever is on sale.

On the internet, this is made easier through the gathering of data, with a view to building up an understanding of preferences and predictions about future actions. Stories of how few data points are necessary in order to create a holistic profile have become common, and can seem to pose significant questions about the nature even of individuality.

Of course, much of this is marketing talk. Nonetheless, this does raise concerns about privacy. Even where good data protection laws exist, it is clear that many are simply not aware of, or choosing not to use their rights.

It also forces us to think about agency. How much choice do we have when we are being steered down a certain path – even unconsciously – by an algorithm?

Finally, how can we maintain a sense of community when we cannot be sure that what we see when we go online is the same as others are seeing, and when there is no emphasis on face-to-face contact?

> *ANY ONE PERSON, THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFE, MAY REQUIRE A WHOLE VARIETY OF TYPES OF INFORMATION, IN LINE WITH THEIR NEEDS – AND PREFERENCES. THIS IS WHAT LIBRARIES PROVIDE.*

In the light of these concerns, ironically, the rise of the online world has helped build understanding of the need for services focused on responding – honestly – to need, in physical places, with physical people in them. Places such as libraries do just this, guaranteeing a service that responds to a wide variety of needs, throughout life, in a space that is intended to be welcoming and open to all.

The 'offer' of a library – access to information – is truly cross-cutting. Information is essential for a whole variety of activities, from education and learning to interacting with eGovernment services, and from public health to cutting edge research. Any one person, throughout their life, may require a whole variety of types of information, in line with their needs – and preferences. This is what libraries provide.

The skills librarians develop are also focused on responding to users' needs. Simply creating as pleasant and welcoming a space as possible is a key part of this, as is a readiness – in line with core principles of the profession – to respect individual users and work in their best interest. In doing so, they provide a model for how to provide a holistic service in the internet age.

2b) Under the impulsion of the United Nations, governments are working to develop holistic policy approaches: Libraries provide a model delivery mechanism

Based on the intervention of Randa Chidiac, Executive Director, Grants and Projects Unit, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon

With so much information available, governments have never been able to take such a comprehensive view of the situation they face. They can see, and even measure, the connections between policy areas and cross-border impacts. For example, security can be necessary for schools or hospitals to function, or new businesses to emerge. But in turn, healthier, richer and fairer societies should be less prone to conflict.

This implies that governments too need to take a comprehensive approach. Indeed, the idea of addressing policy questions on their own is increasingly understood to be futile, or even harmful.

This is not a new understanding. It is closely associated with the concept of sustainable development, which reaches back to the 1970s, but which truly established itself globally with the Brundtland Report in 1987 and the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. Sustainable development policies are those which look across the board, aiming to ensure that actions taken today do not reduce the opportunities and possibilities open to future generations.

Nonetheless, the jump from concept to concrete reality is not always easy. Individual ministries and decision-makers can be jealous of their powers in their field of responsibility, and officials can fail to link up. There are efforts to combat this however, notably through broad-based strategies such as the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

This is a truly global effort, applying to all Member States, and all policy areas. It also comes with a very strong emphasis on the integrity of the whole – in other words, that there needs to be success in each individual area for there to be success in general. Research initiatives, such as the Global Sustainable Development Report, have underlined the existence of cross-cutting factors.

> *LIBRARIES ALSO HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN MAKING A REALITY OF THE CONCEPT OF HOLISTIC POLICYMAKING. IT IS ONLY BY MAKING FULL USE OF THE INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE AVAILABLE THAT DECISION-MAKERS CAN MAKE OF THE LATEST UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN POLICIES, AND EVALUATE THE IMPACTS OF ANY GIVEN CHOICE.*

The United Nations itself has emphasised the links between areas, as well as promoting 'development accelerators' – interventions that can unlock progress across a number of areas. In doing so, it is also encouraging national governments, as they act on the Sustainable Development Goals to take the same holistic, joined-up approach to policy making. How then can governments deliver on this? Of course, they need to use all of the tools at their disposal – the 2030 Agenda indicates as such.

Libraries arguably have a critical role. As guarantors of access to information for citizens, they can be a one-stop-shop for unlocking new possibilities and opportunities. Building – or maintaining – a library in a community can contribute to progress across the SDGs.

Libraries also have a part to play in making a reality of the concept of holistic policymaking. It is only by making full use of the information and evidence available that decision-makers can make of the latest understanding of the relations between policies, and evaluate the impacts of any given choice.

Indeed, as the Global Sustainable Development Report underlines, 'Decision makers need to act based on current knowledge and understanding of the linked human-social-environmental systems at all levels. That knowledge also needs to be more widely available to all countries and actors, motivating innovative coalitions and partnerships for success'.

This all means a vital role for libraries. To understand the interconnectedness of policies and can take a holistic approach requires information. Access to information will also be a key ingredient of policy delivery. Libraries can provide both.
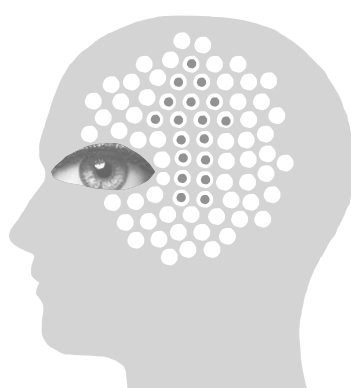
2c) We need to take a holistic approach to the skills we need, and the way we learn: Making learning a lifelong habit in libraries

Based on the intervention of Catharina Isberg, Library Director, Helsingborg City Libraries

It is perhaps a cliché to say that the economic, social and technological changes taking place around us mean that we need all to be learners. We are constantly faced with the new and the necessity to understand and adapt to it.
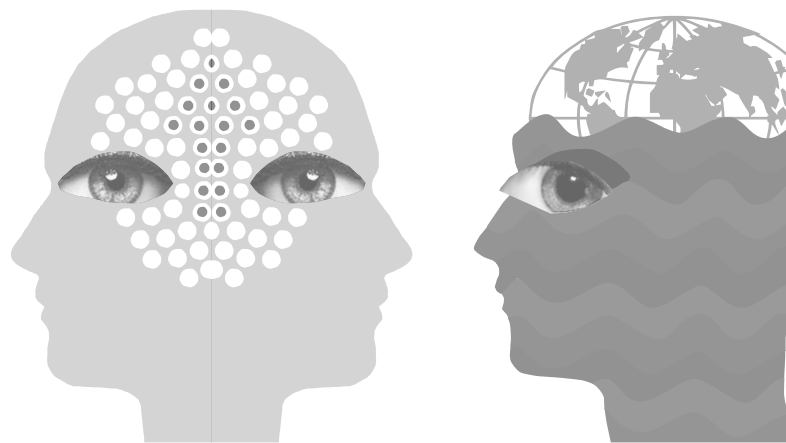
Certainly, the ability of formal education to keep up is stretched. Even in the time between when a child begins and graduates, expectations and prospects change, with curricula often struggling to keep up. The same goes for universities, with library and information schools no less vulnerable than any other institution or faculty.

Many skills of course – including those associated with the ability to provide excellent all-round services to library users – are not even always well-suited to formal education. They are those picked up through practice, through spending time with others or simply through personal reflection. Yet in order to understand and respond to the needs of users effectively, these are no less necessary.

In effect, those graduating from library schools – and from any other institution – risk being left with a certificate and a photo, but also much more left to do.

A first response, at the level of educational institutions, is to focus as much as possible on building the ability to learn throughout life. This can come from developing enabling skills, such as analytical or critical skills that help learners take on and apply new information and knowledge easily.

Yet to respond fully to the holistic needs of learners (and so the holistic requirements of jobs today in the library field), there needs to be a greater openness to other ways of learning and teaching. This applies not only to learners, but also to training providers (who can offer support in a much more diverse way), and to managers (who can support a broader approach through the way they encourage and recognise learning).

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This form of learning is beginning to gain currency. Within institutions and associations, as well as in IFLA itself through the work of the Section on Continuous Professional Development and Workplace Learning, there are not only discussions about approaches, but efforts to put these into practice.

Techniques that have been tried and tested elsewhere – coaching, mentoring, buddying, as well as bite-size learning opportunities – are proving their worth within the library field, building on the wide variety of experience on offer in associations such as IFLA.

Through formal sessions, workshops, online contact, and simply listening and observing, it has therefore been possible for the Section to develop significantly the support offered to those participating. The chance to engage with professionals from different parts of the world, facing different conditions, can be an excellent trigger for critical reflection also, as well as a source of ideas and inspiration.

The next step is to ensure that such approaches can take their place at the heart of strategies and plans for professional development within institutions and associations. In doing this, they should not only use, but start to generate and share sound evidence in order to help others.

In sum, libraries have a long record of offering a variety of opportunities for users to learn and grow through different possibilities and services. We should be able to do the same for ourselves.

3 Working at Scale

3a) The ongoing development of new technologies makes it possible not just to take an international outlook, but also to take international action.

Based on the intervention of Mandla Ntombela, President, African Library and Information Association

The establishment of organisations such as IFLA almost a hundred years ago underline that the desire of libraries to work together internationally is nothing new. However, it is undeniable that recent decades have seen unprecedented opportunities to deliver on this ambition.

The speed and ease with which it is possible not just to send information, but also to exchange it is unprecedented, and has proven a game changer in the way that we look to collaborate.

> *THIS HAS OPENED THE WAY TO HUNDREDS IF NOT THOUSANDS OF POSSIBLE AVENUES OF COOPERATION AND MUTUAL LEARNING.*

Through this opportunity to read or hear about what is going on elsewhere in the world, the similarities in the situations we face from one town to the next, from one region to the next, have become visible. This has opened the way to hundreds if not thousands of possible avenues of cooperation and mutual learning.

In Africa, we can add to all this the sense of the importance of unity and shared identity that crosses the continent. Together with a readiness to collaborate that marks the library field, this makes for a powerful combination.

The task ahead is certainly significant. The more we talk, the more we recognise common challenges – societies where illiteracy remains stubbornly high, development deficits that could benefit from greater access to information, the costs of under-investment in libraries and wider library infrastructure.
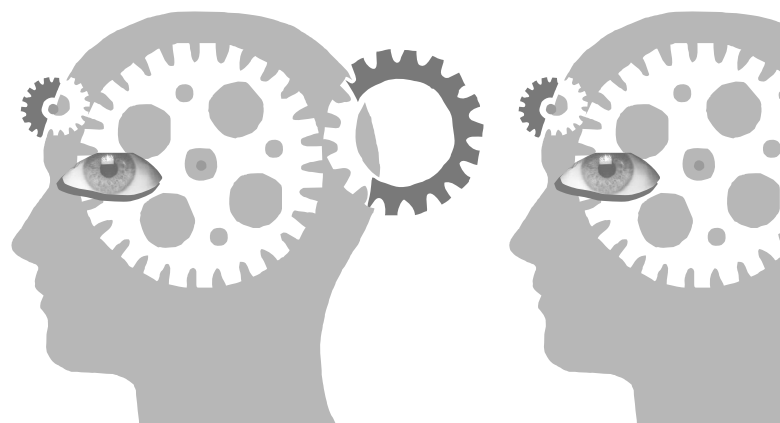
Through discussion, we have been able to explore these issues in more depth, break them down into components, identify the underlying factors, and start to think about what to do next. This matters because where we have challenges in common, we may also have solutions in common.

> *WHERE WE HAVE CHALLENGES IN COMMON, WE MAY ALSO HAVE SOLUTIONS IN COMMON.*

This is one of the key lessons from the IFLA Global Vision, which created a space and context for new conversations across the continent. The focus on action has been essential, encouraging libraries to move into a space where we can be proactive in creating concrete plans.

Sometimes these solutions are simply the adoption of good practice from one area in another. It isn't necessarily possible to scale up a particular technique or programme, but we can adapt it and repeat it elsewhere. But in other cases, there is an opportunity to move things up a level.

> *LIBRARIES CAN GO FROM BEING A SERIES OF MORE OR LESS ISOLATED INSTITUTIONS TO A NETWORK, TO A KNOWLEDGE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE CONTINENT.*

For example, as public libraries become connected to the internet, they can become incubators for local content. As countries implement the Marrakesh Treaty, libraries can lead the drive to realise the right of people with print disabilities to equal access to information. As university libraries work together, the possibility of repositories of African knowledge can become reality.

In effect, libraries can go from being a series of more or less isolated institutions to a network, to a knowledge infrastructure for the continent as a whole.

3b) The making and shaping of policy decisions is increasingly international. To be included, libraries too need to act at an international level

Based on the intervention of Alejandro Santa, Coordinating Director, Library of Congress, Argentina

The days of purely domestic policy-making are perhaps over. Whatever a government does within its borders is not guaranteed to stay there, often having diverse and unpredictable impacts elsewhere. Realising this, those in power have frequently formed agreements with neighbouring countries in order to govern shared resources, such as rivers or lakes, or to discuss how to manage flows of people.

WHATEVER A GOVERNMENT DOES WITHIN ITS BORDERS IS NOT GUARANTEED TO STAY THERE, OFTEN HAVING DIVERSE AND UNPREDICTABLE IMPACTS ELSEWHERE.

Yet shared interests go beyond those felt at borders. Climate change is perhaps the most obvious example, with emissions in one place contributing to global phenomena. However, there are other issues, for example judicial cooperation to combat crime, food, product and labour standards to facilitate trade, and new efforts to promote cross-border research to address shared challenges.

To ensure that such efforts are supported – and to keep them on track – supranational organisations have emerged at the global and regional levels. These not only provide oversight, but also direction and sometimes funding for efforts where a purely national approach would not necessarily make sense.

They also offer a space for learning and sharing of ideas, strategies and results. Even for questions that can seem very local, there is often much to be gained from understanding how others have addressed similar challenges. The backup that a regional or global organisation can provide for this can be indispensable in getting the right people together, and developing guidance or principles which can benefit others.

IN SO MANY OF THE AREAS WHICH ARE DISCUSSED – PUBLIC HEALTH, DIGITAL INCLUSION, LIFELONG LEARNING, INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH AND OF COURSE CLIMATE CHANGE – LIBRARIES HAVE MUCH TO CONTRIBUTE IF THEY ARE PART OF THE CONVERSATION.

The emergence – and existence – of such international processes, either taking or influencing decisions across a wide range of issues, makes them into a logical focus for work by libraries. In so many of the areas which are discussed – public health, digital inclusion, lifelong learning, international research and of course climate change – libraries have much to contribute if they are part of the conversation.

Yet to do this effectively, libraries themselves need to develop a capacity to engage and advocate beyond their own borders. The UN's 2030 Agenda, and the work taking place both at the global and the regional level to deliver on it, provides a strong opportunity to develop this. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the activity of the United Nations regional commission – CEPAL – represents the most obvious target for efforts.

There are other organisations too The Centre for Reading Promotion in Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLALC) also engages strongly with libraries, for example, enabling sharing and learning with a view to building support for our institutions.

Our challenge, as libraries, is therefore to rise to this opportunity, and to develop our own capacity to engage in these conversations through joint and coordinated actions and messages. Latin America and the Caribbean can be a leader in this area, working with IFLA's support to build a truly regional policy and advocacy agenda for libraries.

3c) Thinking and acting at a global level isn't easy: To do it, we need initiatives like the IFLA Global Vision

Based on the intervention of Deborah Jacobs, former Director, Global Libraries, United States

The internet age is marked by grand visions, based on the possibilities opened up by technology. With a single network capable of reaching over half of the world's population almost instantaneously, truly global companies have been able to emerge. This potential of course has not just been limited to the private sector – global movements around issues like climate change have also been born and made themselves felt in thousands of places at once.

> *GRAND PLANS AND EVERYDAY LIFE ARE NOT ALWAYS EASY, HOWEVER, TO COMBINE. WORKING AT SCALE CAN BE DIFFICULT, AND REQUIRES IMAGINATION AND MENTAL EFFORT.*

Grand plans and everyday life are not always easy, however, to combine. Working at scale can be difficult, and requires imagination and mental effort. When faced with local challenges, it can be all too easy to focus back on them and forget the bigger picture. This creates the risk of losing momentum and losing connections, in effect failing to make the link between ideas and action.

This is certainly true in the library field, where there is both a unique potential to work globally, not least through exchanging and giving access to information, but also a mission to respond to the individual needs of users on the ground. For many libraries, faced with under-investment, it can seem hard enough to find the time and resources to deal with the basics, let alone think more broadly. Nonetheless, there are of course great and inspiring examples at the local and national level.

It's essential therefore to find a way of turning cooperation and engagement as part of a global network into a reflex. How to ensure that working at scale is not just logical, but also instinctive for the members of the global library field?

Key to this wll be remembering what holds us together, what we are aiming for. These reference points – shared values, norms and priorities – are what drive social capital, the connections that make it possible for groups of people to achieve things together.

But how can we create an understanding of what is shared across borders, library types and communities? This is where initiatives such as the IFLA Global Vision come in.

The Global Vision, through offering the experience of being part of a single conversation has already created one thing in common. With over 30 000 people in 190 United Nations Member States responding to the Global Vision survey, there are scarcely any countries where someone has not invested time and thought in this process.

> *EVEN THOUGH YOU MAY BE ALONE IN YOUR INSTITUTION, YOU ARE PART OF A MOVEMENT.*

The sense this gives of being part of something bigger is not to be dismissed. Especially for library and information workers carrying out their jobs in isolation, it can be a relief and a reassurance to know this. Even though you may be alone in your institution, you are part of a movement.

But more powerful still has been the opportunity the process has provided to affirm the core shared values of the profession. The dedication to providing equitable access to knowledge is a clear unifying factor, providing a key motivation both for pursuing work in often difficult conditions locally, and also for building new partnerships globally. Our global movement is based on a common mission.

The Global Vision has now led to the new IFLA Strategy. This not only reflects the substance of the priorities set out by the world's library and information workers, with a view to turning vision into action, but also the spirit of collaboration and inclusion that has characterised IFLA over the last few years. It is to be hoped that as we roll up our sleeves and get to work, the Vision will continue to act as a shared reference point, helping us maintain our focus and motivation to succeed for the good of the communities we serve.
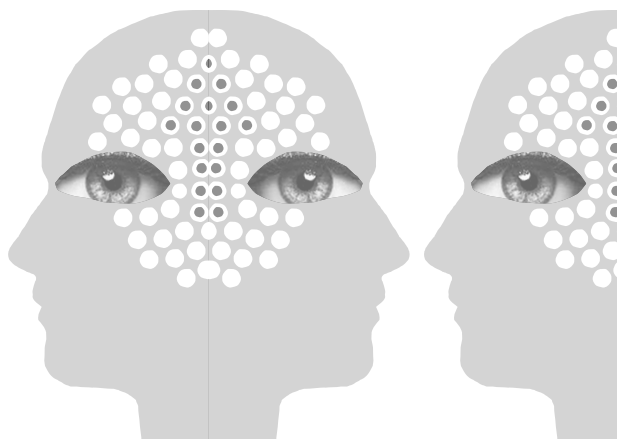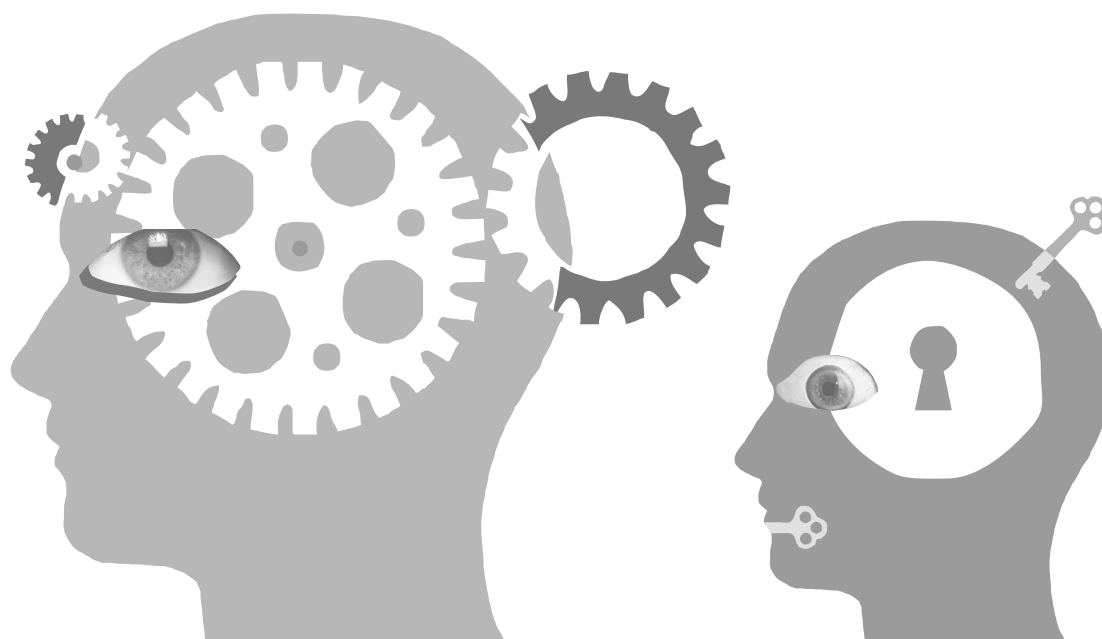
Conclusion

The 2019 Trend Report Update, hopefully, offers an optimistic message. Growing uncertainties about the future are certainly a concern, but it is precisely this uncertainty that underlines the need for the sort of information that libraries can provide.

Similarly, the realisation that things are not so simple provides a strong argument in favour of more intense use of information and recourse to information professionals in order to create understanding where this is currently lacking.

At the individual level, the value of the type of services that libraries provide – genuinely focused on responding to needs in a welcoming space – is clear, as is the possibility to use new approaches and techniques to promote the acquisition of the skills library and information workers need.

At the level of governments, a shift towards working in collaboration at the regional or global level not only helps respond to challenges that spread across borders, but also gives libraries themselves a new target for advocacy and engagement. To reach it, though, libraries themselves will need to make use of the tools that are available to help them work at scale, be ready to dialogue and share ideas frankly and openly, and draw on a sense of shared values as provided by the IFLA Global Vision.

In sum, this year's Trend Report Update aims to provide a useful basis for discussions in libraries and library associations as well as online about the challenges and opportunities our institutions face. Next year's report – the first major new edition since the 2013 original – will bring an entirely new range of perspectives from experts around the world on the trends that are shaping our field and the wider information environment.

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