



PROJECT

PUBLIC LIBRARY POLITICS – A TRANSNATIONAL EVALUATIVE SURVEY OF NATIONAL POLICY MAKERS’S ATTITUDES TO, AND PERCEPTIONS OF, THE ROLE, VALUE AND IMPACT OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES

GOAL

To develop and broaden professional understanding of policy maker’s attitudes to, and perceptions of, public library services.

In particular:

To provide knowledge of national and, where appropriate, local governments’ attitudes to public libraries in terms of

- their value for individuals and groups in society
- their contribution to the democratic process
- their contribution to economic development
- their contribution to policy priorities

To provide data on the kind of evidence required by national, and where appropriate local, policy makers when taking decisions about public library services

To provide data on policy makers knowledge and awareness of national and international professional documents (e.g. the IFLA / UNESCO Guidelines)

METHODOLOGY

A sample of countries will be identified from the IFLA membership. It is anticipated that this sample will cover between 6 – 10 countries and be illuminative rather than representative. In each selected country a local project officer will be identified and appointed to undertake the data collection for that country.

This will involve:

A Literature review

A review of the appropriate professional and political literature. In addition the local project officer will also undertake a critical evaluation of existing statements from governments and policy makers

Interviews

Semi structured interviews with policy makers who have responsibility for public library services. These may be at the national or regional level as appropriate.

Semi structure interviews with civil servants with responsibilities for public library services

Interviews with the Chief Executives, or equivalent of appropriate professional associations.

In order to minimize travel costs the majority of these interviews will be undertaken by telephone.

It is anticipated that the research instruments will be designed by the project head in consultation with members of the IFLA SC on LTR.

Workshop

Preliminary data in the form of an interim report will be presented at the IFLA Conference to be held in Glasgow. These will form the basis for a thematic workshop at which the data will be assessed and discussed. This is seen as an integral part of the research process. This technique has been used successfully in previous projects undertaken by the DIS at Sheffield.

Post workshop analysis

Following the Glasgow workshop local project officers will continue to analyze and refine their data, making use of the views obtained at the workshop. They will then produce a chapter / report on the situation in their country.

Overall editorial work will be undertaken by nominated members of the SC on LTR who will also produce an evaluative summary and conclusions. It is anticipated that the final report will be published in time for the 2003 IFLA conference.

OUTPUTS

- Workshop at IFLA conference in Glasgow 2002
- Publication by IFLA 2003
- Further presentation/ review at Berlin IFLA 2003

Data that can be used as an advocacy tool for professionals as an aid for political persuasion. This is not to prejudge the results of the survey but to acknowledge that even "negative " opinions will be useful as part of the political education of the profession.

OUTCOMES

An understanding of national and international political perceptions of the public library service, which will help professionals in their "political" management of services. This could be fed into IFLA's strategic thinking and perhaps help the association with regard to its political relations.

PROJECT REPORT 2002

Introduction:

The aim of the study is to provide information on national and, where appropriate because of local circumstances, local or regional government's attitudes to public libraries in terms of:

- Their value for individuals and groups in society;
- their contribution to the democratic process;
- their contribution to economic development;
- their contribution to policy priorities.

Work undertaken to date

Local project officers have been identified in a number of countries. These were asked to provide a brief introduction on how national government impacts on public library and information services in their country. For example what Ministries / Government Departments have an interest in library and information services? What is the relationship between the government and the major professional association? They were also asked to outline any legislation, or policy statements, from central government that have implications for public library services.

In a number of locations the local project officers started the data collection early in 2002. This took the form of a brief literature review, and an analysis of interviews with policy makers (politicians) and their civil servants. In order to obtain the professional perspective some interviews were also held with senior members of the major professional associations. A draft interview schedule was developed by the research team, although it is recognised that this might need to be adapted for local circumstances, Where, and if the respondent agreed, the interviews have been recorded. So far on site reports have been received from Australia, Uganda and the United Kingdom.

An integral part of the project is to discuss and review findings with information professionals and politicians. To this end some preliminary findings were presented to a workshop at the IFLA conference held in Glasgow. Participants at this were given a summary of preliminary findings and members of the research team summarised the information received to that date. Delegates were then divided into small groups to discuss and test the major themes arising from the research. A small discussion booklet was produced by the research team to facilitate this discussion.

This proved to be a valuable exercise helping to clarify a number of issues and shape future work on the project. Most significantly, as a result of the Glasgow workshop further local project officers were recruited. This will broaden the coverage of the study, for example to include France, Sri Lanka, and Scandinavia. We have also received expressions of interest from the Bertelsmann Foundation who are working on a related topic.

It is anticipated that an evaluative summary and conclusions will be available in time for the 2003 IFLA

conference. Nominated members of the SC on LTR will then undertake the final editorial work in order to produce a final report.

Progress on outputs identified in original proposal

Workshop at IFLA conference in Glasgow 2002 : This took place; a workshop booklet was produced and the workshop was well received.

Publication by IFLA 2003: Preliminary data will be available for Autumn 2003 but due to the increased interest in the project following the Glasgow workshop it is anticipated that a full final publication may be delayed until early 2004.

Further presentation/ review at Berlin IFLA 2003: This is already being planned as a joint session with the Management of Library Associations Section.

The following working papers have been produced to date:

Ikoja-Odongo, J.R., Public library politics: the Ugandan perspective;
Smith, K., Australian politicians and the public library: background report;
Usherwood. B., Public library politics – an international perspective.

Bob Usherwood
December 2002

Additionally:

Political perceptions of public libraries in the Netherlands, Netherlands Public Library Association (NBLC), 2003 at:

<http://www.debibliotheken.nl/content.jsp?objectid=3893&highlights=perceptions>

Furthermore, a joint session was held at IFLA, Berlin 2003, which included reports from various countries.

134. Management of Library Associations & Library Theory and Research - Workshop

Libraries and politics - how to bring libraries and national associations into the political sphere?

1. Public Library Politics - an international perspective: Welcoming introduction by the chairs of the organising Sections
KERRY SMITH, Library Theory and Research Section
CHRISTINA STENBERG, Management of Library Association Section
2. [Politicians and librarians behind the same wheel](#)
CHRISTOF EICHERT (Deutschen Bibliotheksverbandes e.V., Ludwigsburg, Germany)
3. Political perceptions - a view from Sri Lanka
PREMILA GAMAGE (Institute of Policy Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka) and UPALI AMARASIRI (National Library of Sri Lanka, Colombo, Sri Lanka)
4. [Political perceptions - a view from Croatia](#)
ALEKSANDRA HORVAT (Dept. of Information Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb, Croatia)
5. [Public library politics: the Ugandan perspective](#)
ROBERT IKOJA ODONGO (East African School of Library and Information Science, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda)
6. [Politicians and librarians behind the same wheel](#)
[Les bibliothécaires et les politiciens : en route vers un but commun](#)
FINN VESTER (Danish Library Association, Copenhagen, Denmark)
7. Round Table, including comments from
ELLEN TISE (South Africa) and BOB USHERWOOD (UK)

**Political Perceptions ~
Policy maker's attitudes regarding the role, value, and
impact of the public library.
A Trans national evaluation**

***Booklet for Workshop
Wednesday 21 August 2002
Glasgow***

You are asked to consider the following questions

- ✓ Should library services contribute to the political objectives of the government?
- ✓ How can library services contribute to the political objectives of the government?
- ✓ What are the implications of this for the 'neutrality' of public libraries and their staff?
- ✓ What are the indicators that can be used for assessing the achievement of political objectives?
- ✓ Is there still something sufficiently distinctive about public library services to justify them being made publicly available without charge?
- ✓ What kind of evidence will persuade politicians that this is the case?
- ✓ What kind of evidence will persuade politicians of the value and impact of public library services?
- ✓ How should evidence be presented to politicians?
- ✓ Does politics matter?

Please elect or nominate a chairperson, and a reporter who will present a summary of your discussion to the workshop as a whole. Remember your discussion will be used to inform the final report. In the discussion please give examples based on your experience.

Some quotations to start you thinking

"Although the library has no natural enemies, it suffers concurrently from the fact that it has no natural allies. In a political system...where governmental action follows the main stream of pressure from producer groups, the library serving a minority of individual consumers, floats along helplessly" (Garceau 1949)

"Librarians sometimes appear to be afflicted by a naive faith in the power of reason to overcome ignorance simply by the force of compelling arguments. While this is not a bad premise with which to start, it does not go nearly far enough" (Berkerman 1996)

"[Political] Parties... seem to provide crucial elements in the decision-making process. Perhaps the best analogy to a party in this context is that of a prism; the party transforms other major elements in line with party ideology and the need to get re-elected." (Sharpe and Newton 1984)

"All parties (though not all men) seem to be in favour of libraries, at any rate in thriving and peaceful times." (Savage's 1942)

"The starting point for ...a national strategy must be the identification of the areas in which libraries can make the most contribution to the Government's objectives." (British Government background document 2002)

"It is enough to examine the lists of authors and titles with which the personnel of the Front National have tried to "regulate" the Bibliothèques municipales of numerous towns... It is evident that for them the library is essentially political, a means of distributing ideology" (Members of staff: Bibliothèque municipale de Strasbourg 1997)

"let any politician who attacks public employees as a class know where you and your friends stand ...you must, to the very best of your ability, make public servants in general and librarians in particular seem dangerous" (J. K. Galbraith 1979)

"The Government expects books and the printed word to remain at the core of the public library service" (UK Secretary of State 1999)

"Libraries are at the fore-front of learning, particularly Life Long Learning and we must make sure they are valued" (Politician 2000)

"The government argues that a poor man has no time to read. An illiterate person has no business to do with books. A sick person is overwhelmed with disease that reading does not have meaning. (Ikoja-Odongo 2002)

"Acquiring power and influence is necessary for the successful management of an information services organization" (St Clair 1994)

"The first rule is to think of the people you are trying to convince. Who are they? What do they want? What do they know already? Will they be familiar with technical terms? Do they have the expertise, the time or the interest to read detailed material? What options do they have in mind?" (Toss Gascoigne 1996)

"Corridors of Whitehall, Westminster and Brussels are familiar enough to those who have trodden them; but to most people they are as forbidding and unknown a territory as King Minos's labyrinth and their successful negotiation as unlikely. As a general rule, those who have no experience in this field are ill advised to take it on themselves." (George Cunningham 1989)

"I asked [name of librarian] what he thought, and he said that some of his colleagues wouldn't know a politician from Father Christmas, and would be likely to ask for a present from either in exactly the same terms. I took this to mean that he had no great opinion of the political awareness of those he had in mind." (Monroe 1987)

"We need to stress the value placed on the service by the community and the high esteem it is held in" (Committee Chair 2000)

"I am looking for a demonstrated relationship between library costs and benefits more closely related to the institution's teaching mission... Is there a relationship between the nature of students' library use and their academic performance? If we can isolate linkages...then the library should be more competitive in the budget arena. If not we may have to rethink the library's mission within the institution" (Leonard 1992)

If I have to pay to play golf, pay to use the local pool and pay sporting club fees, why shouldn't I also pay to use the local public library?" (Senior local government administrator interviewed 2002)

"...the results of a social audit could prove to be a valuable marketing tool, in the sense that it can provide many kinds of valid evidence of the value of a service to your fund holders, be they politicians, as in the UK, or boards of trustees in the US. It can also make visible to the public just what the library can do — it personalises it, and helps people relate to it." (Lyon 1998)

"..., play the stats game anytime. Go to the politicians with anecdotal evidence to support the figures. You should go with evidence from those borrowers who read at the moment, those who are supportive and loyal to the service" (Arts worker 2000)

"Arithmetic has its uses, but neither the injuries inflicted by inequality nor the benefits conferred by diminishing it can be reliably explained by sums in long division. In reality, the consequences of social expenditure depend, not merely on its amount, but on the character of the evils removed and the opportunities opened by it." (R. H. Tawney 1975)

"Stress the economic value of libraries. Often mentioning lost souls falls on deaf ears but demonstrating that libraries help with the local economy is when ears become open" (Arts worker 2000)

" try to convince people that reading impacts on other areas. That's been the thrust of our argument" (Librarian 2000)

"Politicians are interested in IT. they like hard facts for instance we took the LA recommendations and explained that we had a shortfall in the book fund according to national recommendations. they then increased our budget by £4400. We also stress the library as a safe environment as it is a corporate objective - safety in the community. But we never focus on reading as such." (Librarian 2000)

"When the standards have been established ... the Secretary of State can give strong consideration to allocating any available funds to public libraries specifically to boost their book stocks and not to be substituted for existing expenditure" (Publishers Association 2000)

We have our own standards they are much more influential than the IFLA Standards (Civil Servant respondent 2002)

"It isn't difficult to create arguments as to the educational role and / or civic benefits of lending instructional material, history, sociology and so on, as well as reference material free, but the case for fiction is more difficult" (Comedia 1993)

"...its the effect and image one creates that really counts. Compare British Prime Minister John Major with the average librarian and you understand why both struggle to survive" (Nijboer 1994)

"We rely heavily on the advice of the Chief Librarian and her management team. We know the value of libraries, but we can never give enough money for books." (Committee Chair 2000)

We welcome advice from professionals but it depends on which group (Civil Servant respondent 2002)

"Promotion is like kissing a member of the opposite sex in the dark. You know what's going on, the person you're kissing knows what's going on, but no one else does unless you turn on a light." (Kreig-Sigman 1995)

Marketing of public library services is very low. Level of awareness of the role of public library services in government and the general public is minimal and needs to be intensified. Public librarians have not marketed themselves and services adequately. Public libraries hardly are mentioned in development plans directly. (Respondent 2002)

The conventional wisdom that politicians habitually respond to public opinion when making major policy decisions is wrong (Jacobs & Shapiro 2000)

"We've got to make our arguments for libraries and arts political ones. We've got to start to talk in language our [political] colleagues will understand.. For too long we've talked with pride about the absence of politics from Libraries and Arts" (Chair of local "Library" Committee)