



# Libraries empowering Europe!

On 9 and 10 May 2016, the most important annual European library gathering took place in The Hague, World Library Capital.

Directors and Presidents of major European libraries and associations as well as policy-makers and representatives of ministries joined on the topic of "*Empowering Europe! Libraries opening up new perspectives*".

Over 90 participants from all over Europe addressed the cutting-edge issues around libraries in a European environment, in the context of civic participation, library advocacy and open access.

Inspired by the EU-presidency themes, especially the Union's aim to empower and protect all citizens, the programme addressed libraries' actual topics and concerns about opening up libraries to the outside world, especially in relation to jobs and growth as mentioned in the opening speeches.

Dimitris Protopsaltou (Chief Operating Officer, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre, Greece) explained how libraries open up new perspectives by taking Greece as an example.

Mr. Protopsaltou described the network of innovative libraries that has been developed in recent years culminating in the creation of the soon to be opened National Library serving as a public library.

Ilona Kish (Programme Director, Public Libraries 2020, Brussels, Belgium) talked to the audience through how to increase influence at the European Parliament, and introduced a toolkit on helping to change perceptions about libraries in Europe.

## **Civic participation**

The conference worked on a policy for supporting civic participation in the social, cultural, scientific and democratic fields. Libraries with science cafés, digital literacy workshops and tailor made courses are evolving into informal learning hubs which help citizens to add meaning to their lives.

Participants exchanged with models and best practices highlighting examples of excellence in modern library services. What was clear from all perspectives is that change is needed, not only in library professionalism and management, but also in the political perceptions about the role that libraries can play in daily life. Regional cooperation in Portugal for instance shows that both mayors and library directors can cooperate for effective public services.

What is needed for an empowered Europe is the possibility to connect public library networks with national digital resources



and open access to scientific content. This enacts innovation and involves citizens in the design of the library and information services.

Participants perceived the outdated copyright framework as an obstacle to public access and cross-border services. 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens navigating cross-border offline and online have high expectations of up to date sources of information.

### **The European challenge**

Research has shown that 24 million Europeans have participated in non-formal learning activities in libraries, while 4,6 million have accessed the Internet for the first time in a library. 250.000 people find new jobs by going online. Libraries are invaluable to the 23 million people who are currently unemployed on our continent.

Libraries are still one of the most frequented public spaces in our society. They develop and deliver innovative programmes and services. That will be demonstrated during an exhibition to be hosted in the European Parliament in October during the EU Code Week.

EBLIDA and its partners NAPLE, IFLA, LIBER and PL2020 are working together towards practical solutions based on library experience and expertise. All participants are encouraged to be real library ambassadors for a creative and empowered Europe.

While policy is still in the drafting stages, libraries are already in the process of realising concrete projects which benefit all socio-economic groups.

Activities in libraries which are based around children, stimulates their interest in and engagement with culture and the sciences. Some excellent examples of this were demonstrated during the conference with examples from Greece, the United Kingdom and Croatia. Closer cooperation between different types of libraries, universities and science institutions are taking place through open science.

Involved and committed citizens are the best ambassadors for effective public services and libraries are the very place where it is happening. Every day, throughout Europe.