

Summary



Libraries – Democracy – Civil Society / Libraries as Sites of Active Democracy – A Call for More Political Support (Maria Fentz, Anne Wellingerhof)
(pp. 646 – 649)

Especially in politically exciting times a library can support its users with a wide range of media and by helping them use information and media more competently in order to make sense of issues confronting civil society. The library can be not only a venue for political discussions, but also an institution that helps citizens to form their own opinions based on reputable source materials. And, last but not least, libraries are bastions of free information, offering everyone access to their collections and to the Internet. They support users seeking access to digital media and help young people become able to recognize »fake news«.

The challenge consists in getting governments to make an active commitment to creating the conditions by which libraries can fulfil their function as venues of active democracy. There are many topics to consider: digitalisation and the many prospects it makes available, but also the difficulties in enabling all citizens to use them, the growing technological deficits in rural areas, and also the on-going debates on issues that worry many people with regard to immigration and the best way of dealing with refugees and integration. Governments also have the responsibility to ensure funding for the continuing education of library staff, so that they can react to the changing circumstances of digitalisation and to demographic changes by expanding their own professional competencies. Libraries need to respond to the urgent issues of our times. If they do, they will continue to be an attractive venue for active users in the digital age.

Must Libraries Remain Neutral? / A Commentary on the Issue of Neutrality (R. David Lankes)
(pp. 650 – 652)

Libraries have never been neutral. The books we acquire cost money and this sets limits to the choice of further materials. Our opening hours are biased in favour of certain groups of users, to the disadvantage of others. Our place of residence, our education, the colour of our skin, our language, all have an influence on how we see the world and how we act in day-to-day life. As librarians we have clear, unambiguous attitudes – we call them principles. Are you of the opinion that access to libraries and information should not be reserved only for individuals who enjoy prosperous lives? This is not a universal belief, but an attitude about which we have reached a consensus – and it is not neutral.

The communities in our society, particularly the ones without a voice, don't need a place to retreat to. To be of service to immigrants we can't be the one place in society they feel welcome. We must fight to make them welcome throughout society. It is not sufficient to encourage reading among adolescents. We need to ensure that all children and young adults have access to good schools, education and elements of culture in all areas of their lives. It is not enough to provide access to the Internet, we must provide our communities with the knowledge to change the Internet itself. Smart cities driven by data need smart citizens who understand technology and its impact on privacy and liberty.

When you don't act, you are being the opposite of neutral. Then you are irrelevant or worse still, a false comfort to those in need of help.

Dialogue and Change in International Librarianship / A Report on the 85th IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) in Athens, Greece (Eva Bunge, Anne-Kathrin Wallmann)
(pp. 672 – 674)

The 85th IFLA World Congress took place in Athens, Greece, from 24 - 30 August 2019. In keeping with its motto »Libraries: dialogue for change«, many things at the world congress signalled change: the paper on »IFLA Strategy 2019 – 2024« was published; a process was initiated to adapt the structures which govern IFLA; and a new IFLA president took office, to name only a few points. As usual a team of young professionals was sent by the German library associations' commission »Bibliothek & Information International« (BII) to the congress in order to prepare German translations of congress proceedings and report back to the German-speaking community – including here in BuB.

At the ceremonial opening session of the world congress on 24 August every seat was occupied in the large concert hall of the Athens Congress Centre. Late-comers who did not arrive with duly professional punctuality had to make do with standing places. Altogether, according to the IFLA General Secretary Gerald Leitner, 3636 participants from over 140 countries had come to Athens to attend the congress, to exchange ideas with one another and to learn new things. They experienced not only many professionally interesting presentations and lively discussions, but also a global library community, one that is politically active at many levels. In his opening speech, the general secretary, for example, brought up the tight circumstances of librarians in Greece, who still suffer under difficult financial restrictions, and directly addressed Greece's Deputy Minister for Education, Sofia Zacharaki, who was present in the audience. Libraries are important institutions which even in times of economic limitations can help improve the lives of many people.

Translated by Martha Baker