



UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1972

In 1949, UNESCO issued a manifesto on the purpose of the public library. To mark International Book Year, UNESCO asked the Public Libraries Section of the International Federation of Library Associations to prepare a revised manifesto, taking into account the changes and developments that have taken place over nearly twenty-five years. This new manifesto appears below. It will be translated into all the major languages of the world and presented to the conference of IFLA at Budapest later this year. The establishment and maintenance of public libraries is a task of government at national and local level.

It is the hope of UNESCO that where the public library does not meet the needs outlined in this manifesto, educationists, social and cultural workers, and community leaders will stimulate interest, and promote by all means the creation of a public-library service which will be a central and dynamic force in the busy and growing community.

The public library UNESCO and public libraries

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was founded to promote peace and spiritual welfare by working through the minds of men and women. This manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and understanding between people and between nations.



The public library: *A democratic institution for education, culture, and information*

The public library is a practical demonstration of democracy's faith in universal education as a continuing and lifelong process, in the appreciation of the achievement of humanity in knowledge and culture. The public library is the principal means whereby the record of man's thoughts and ideas, and the expression of his creative imagination, are made freely available to all. The public library is concerned with the refreshment of man's spirit by the provision of books for relaxation and pleasure, with assistance to the student, and with provision of up-to-date technical, scientific and sociological information.

The public library should be established under the clear mandate of law, so framed as to ensure nation-wide provision of public library service. Organized co-operation between libraries is essential so that total national resources should be fully used and be at the service of any reader.

It should be maintained wholly from public funds, and no direct charge should be made to anyone for its services.

To fulfil its purposes, the public library must be readily accessible, and its doors open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, language, status or educational attainment.

Resources and services

The public library must offer to adults and children the opportunity to keep in touch with their times, to educate themselves continuously and keep abreast of progress in the sciences and arts.

Its contents should be a living demonstration of the



evolution of knowledge and culture, constantly reviewed, kept up to date and attractively presented. In this way it will help people form their own opinions and develop their creative and critical capacities and powers of appreciation. The public library is concerned with the communication of information and ideas, whatever the form in which these may be expressed.

Since the printed word has been for centuries the accepted medium for the communication of knowledge, ideas and information, books, periodicals, newspapers remain the most important resources of public libraries.

But science has created new forms of record and these will become an increasing part of the public library's stock, including print in reduced form for compact storage and transport, films, slides, gramophone records, audio and video tape, for adults and children, with the necessary equipment for individual use and for cultural activities.

The total collection should include material on all subjects, to satisfy all tastes at differing educational and cultural standards.

All languages used by a community should be represented, and there should be books of world importance in their original languages.

The public library building should be centrally situated, accessible to the physically handicapped, and open at times convenient to the user. The building and its furnishings should be attractive, informal and wellcoming, and direct access by readers to the shelves is essential.

The public library is a natural cultural centre for the community, bringing together as it does people of similar interests. Space and equipment are therefore necessary for exhibitions, discussions, lectures, musical performances and films, both for adults and children.

Branch libraries and mobile libraries should be provided in rural and suburban areas.

Trained and competent staff in adequate numbers are vital to select and organize resources and assist users. Special training will be required for many activities such as work



with children and handicapped, audio-visual materials, and the organization of cultural activities.

Use by children

It is in early life that a taste for books and the habit of using libraries and their resources are most easily acquired. The public library has therefore a particular duty to provide opportunity for the informal and individual choice of books and other material by children. Special collections and, if possible, separate areas should be provided for them. The children's library can then become a lively, stimulating place, in which activities of various kinds will be a source of cultural inspiration .

Use by students

Students of all ages must be able to rely on the public library to supplement the facilities provided by their academic institutions. Those pursuing individual studies may be entirely dependent on the public library to meet their needs for books and information.

The handicapped reader

There is an increasing concern with the welfare of the elderly and all handicapped people. Problems of loneliness, and mental and physical handicaps of all kinds, can be alleviated in many ways by the public library. Improved means of access, provision of mechanical reading aids, books in large print and recorded on tape, service in hospitals and institutions, and personal service



to the home are some of the ways in which the public library can extend its services to those who need it most.



The public library in the community

The public library should be active and positive in its outlook, demonstrating the value of its services and encouraging their use.

It should link itself with other educational, social and cultural institutions, including schools, adult-education groups, leisure activity groups and with those concerned with the promotion of the arts.

It should be watchful for the emergence of new needs and interests in the community, such as the establishment of groups with special reading requirements and new leisure interests to be represented in the library's collections and activities.

