

Public Libraries Knowledge Agenda

Building knowledge together

Credits

Design: Carlien Keilholtz

Authors: Marianne Hermans and Marjolein Oomes

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Netherlands (KB) 2019

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SUMMARY

What knowledge is needed to support the unique role and significance of libraries in the short and medium term? What kind of insights will help to outline strategic perspectives for future library functions? The Knowledge Agenda outlines three overarching themes that can serve as a basis for research into the changing role and positioning of libraries.

The Knowledge Agenda is a guide for future research into libraries and a coordinating mechanism to bring libraries to the attention of professionals and researchers from various disciplines. The Agenda aims to stimulate research carried out by and for the sector, with scope for new insights and perspectives.

Researchers are called upon to explore topics from the Knowledge Agenda with a view to collaboration between different disciplines and areas of expertise. Professionals from the sector are invited to share examples from their own working practice and to draw on research in designing policy. This will allow the globally formulated themes to be specified in more detail.

Based on an exploration of trends, discussions with experts and exchanges with researchers, three overarching themes for future research were formulated:

1. The role of the library in public space

The first theme explores the library as a public place by addressing a variety of questions, such as: how can libraries address urgent societal issues through their public function? What is the importance of the library as a public meeting space? How can libraries facilitate urban dialogue? How is their social function transforming under the influence of digitalisation and social trends?

2. The information function in a digital society

The second theme is an exploration of the consequences of digitisation and datafication. In today's information society, it has become difficult to find relevant and reliable information. Not everyone has the skills to navigate the information landscape, check facts and critically judge misinformation. How is the guiding role of libraries changing in an era of fake news, filter bubbles and surveillance?

3. The library as an open centre for learning and development

The third theme focusses on the skills needs of citizens, whether in employment, education or retirement. The aim is to equip citizens with the knowledge and skills they need for professional purposes, and to facilitate people who want to learn based on personal motivation.

Building knowledge together

INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid technological innovation and uncertainty due to global changes, libraries are of great significance. In the changing media landscape, libraries help people to navigate an abundance of information. Libraries create connections. They bring people into contact with each other and with the world around them and provide access to cultural resources and information on every aspect of their lives. How do we ensure that libraries can continue to fulfil their connecting role in an age of digital transformation?

“ Today people question whether libraries still have a future. This is the wrong question. More pertinent is to ask what kind of libraries are needed in tomorrow’s world. ”

(Worpole, 2013)

Looking ahead

The societal and administrative context that libraries operate in is changing faster than ever before. Their traditional distribution function is broadening to a wide social and educational remit, which implies that libraries have a role to play in many different fields. A panoramic, long-term perspective will help anticipating tomorrow's world: a view on what is happening in society and how this impacts us all. In the Knowledge Agenda three general themes where societal issues and the library world meet are identified. Trends that will affect libraries in the coming years and the research needed to shape their role in society are discussed.

Research as foundation

Research is essential for a properly functioning library system because it keeps us in touch with what is happening in the sector as well as the societal domains in which public libraries operate. As part of its nationwide governance role, the National Library of the Netherlands (KB) invested in the development of monitoring instruments and research tools. Thus far, research largely focused on the evaluation of national policy programmes and on meeting the KB's statutory core functions under the Public Library Provisions Systems Act (*Wet stelsel openbare bibliotheekvoorzieningen*, Wsob). The needs of specific groups are being investigated and there is a growing focus on effect measurement.

The knowledge base acquired due to these efforts provides a clear picture of the working practice of libraries, their target groups and the position they occupy in society. A solid foundation has been laid that provides the basis for future library research. The KB will do this by continuing with current programmes, but also by broadening its horizons. This Knowledge Agenda is the first step in this direction. In this Agenda, issues expected to feature prominently on the social agenda in the coming years are identified. Three new general themes are outlined that the KB believes are relevant to the library sector and for which little policy has so far been made. These themes are also in the sights of national knowledge organisations and are receiving attention from various disciplines. The emphasis of these new knowledge themes is on looking ahead, observing and experimenting.

New knowledge themes

The Knowledge Agenda is based on an inventory of societal trends that touch on the library's core functions. The themes and underlying research questions are based on an inventory of trend analyses, policy documents, expert meetings and research reports that concern not just the library sector but surrounding sectors as well and society as a whole. Bearing in mind the current knowledge base and its omissions, three general themes for knowledge development were identified that have so far received little attention in research into libraries. In the following chapters, trends and topics are examined for each theme and several exploratory questions for future research are formulated.

The general themes are:

- › The role of the library in public space
- › The information function of the library in a digital society
- › The library as an open centre for learning and development

Synergy and collaboration

A useful framework for innovative research cannot be built in isolation. The KB operates within a network of library organisations and knowledge institutions. In that network, it strives for synergy by continuously identifying focal points and priorities for research in dialogue with the sector and incorporating those into its activities. The aim of the Knowledge Agenda is to bring a fresh impetus to research carried out by and for the sector. The KB invites contributions from sectoral institutions, research institutes and library organisations. This not only applies to the development of knowledge through research, but also to the sharing of that knowledge and its translation to the working practice of local libraries.

Broadening the network

The Knowledge Agenda aims to give direction to research collaboration that transcends the boundaries of the sector. Based on the conviction that collaboration can contribute to current understanding and innovative insights, the KB will focus in the coming years on broadening the network, and profiling public libraries as a relevant partner and a general topic of study and academic research. With this the KB will also focus on disciplines such as sociology and architecture that do not have a history of involvement with public libraries but may nevertheless shed an interesting new light on them.

Theme 1:

THE ROLE OF
THE LIBRARY
IN PUBLIC
SPACE

Social and societal challenges have increased in recent years due to factors such as population ageing and urbanisation, the growing numbers of people living alone and the coexistence of groups from different ethnic backgrounds. These trends may lead to widening divisions in society. Public space, the place where people meet each other on a daily basis, has a key role to play in bridging these gaps. In an open society, there is room for a public sphere where social debate can take place and opinions are formed. Although the importance of that space is increasing, the number of places where encounters can occur is decreasing.

How do social and societal trends and digitisation influence the public role of the library?

Topics and trends

Social divisions lead to concerns about the social fabric

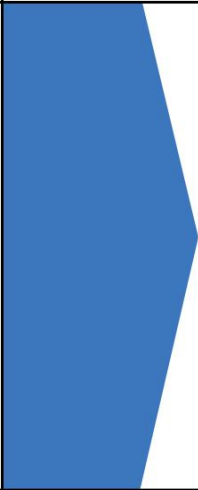
Individualisation and digitisation are leading to concerns about the decline of cohesion and solidarity in society. Loneliness and social exclusion are a societal problem among young people too (Van den Broek et al., 2016). Although modern society is diverse in many respects, it has become easier to live separately side-by-side with the risk of getting stuck within our own internet bubbles. Furthermore, society does not offer equal opportunities for all. The well-educated have advantages both in education and on the labour market. The greatest divide in Dutch society runs according to level of education: the higher and lower educated are increasingly living separate lives (Bovens, Dekker & Tiemeijer, 2014).

Superdiversity

The population of the Netherlands continues to grow, largely as a result of immigration. For a long time, integration policy was focused on the largest groups of ethnic minorities. In the past three decades, however, the Netherlands has evolved from a relatively uniform society with one or two large migrant populations into a heterogeneous society with many small migrant groups. Ethnic and cultural diversity is set to increase even further and become a structural feature of Dutch society (Jennissen, Engbersen, Bokhorst and Bovens, 2018). Some commentators worry that the trend towards a “superdiverse” society may fuel further tensions (Van den Broek et al., 2016).

Privatisation of public space

Physical places and public facilities that invite people to participate in social life and meet others can help bridge differences. Many traditional public meeting places, such as parks, community centres and market squares, are disappearing due to cutbacks or being taken over by commercial organisations. As a result, they are no longer publicly accessible. The loss of “third places” – informal locations with a neutral status – can pose a threat to social cohesion. Although society is becoming more diverse, people have less contact with others from outside their own group (Van den Broek et al., 2016).



Third place

The term “third place” was coined by urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, who in his book *The Great Good Place* (1989) wrote about the importance of informal public meeting spaces, such as cafés and coffee shops, for local democracy and the vitality of communities. The library is often described as a third place too: a place where everyone, irrespective of age, origin or status, feels at home. A place that is open and accessible, free of charge, and relevant to its environment.

Decline in public familiarity

The idea of public familiarity – as a counterpart to anonymity – is that people who meet regularly in public spaces become familiar to each other to some extent. Recognition of others leads to feelings of trust, safety and identification with the local district or neighbourhood. Where the likelihood of accidental encounters decreases and people are less likely to bump into each other, mutual familiarity declines (Duyvendak & Wekker, 2015). This might reduce cohesion and a tolerance for people with different views, resulting in polarisation and a tendency for people to seek the safety of their own homes.

Civic labs and self-organisation

The decline in opportunities for encounters contrasts sharply with the government's policy of giving citizens more responsibility and control over the design of public space in a spirit of shared ownership. There is increasing demand for self-organisation in communities and collaboration in networks, leading to new forms of collective decision-making. Citizens and institutions are solving societal issues themselves, such as maintenance of playgrounds or green spaces, or local facilities for the elderly.

Technology has expanded the opportunities for civic participation, for example through the use of digital means to give people a say on local issues. Technology has also increased the opportunities for citizens to contribute to the work of institutional organisations, such as the judiciary or academia.

What does this mean for libraries?

Space is needed for encounters on the street, in parks and squares and buildings where the diversity of society is expressed in understated ways. The library is one of these public places where you do not have to do anything and where you casually come into contact with other people, with new perspectives and stories. A safe place where you can be offline for a while, disconnected from modern social life that largely takes place online. A public sphere between work and private life, with no commercial or ideological approach, where you can be part of a community.

However, libraries barely receive a mention in municipal planning policies or in policy initiatives on the design of public space. Local governments sometimes take the view that the functions of a library can equally well be housed in a different setting, such as schools or facilities for the elderly. However, from the perspective of urban policy, libraries can play a logical and key role in tackling local issues.

Meeting place function

Growing pressure on public space and the time spent online rather than with other people will increase the importance of the library as a public, safe and reliable physical meeting place.

National and international library policy underlines the library's function as a meeting place and its role in connecting people and bridging differences between population groups.

“ In a world where technology, robots and data are increasingly taking over from humans, places where people can come together are vital. I firmly believe that a good library can be such a place. ”

(Lucas De Man, theatre director and programme maker, at the 2018 National Library Conference)

The library is a place for dialogue

In its *Multicultural Library Manifesto*, the IFLA describes the library as a “gateway to a cultural diverse society in dialogue” (IFLA/UNESCO, 2018). In his contribution to the 2018 National Library Conference, Maarten Hajer talked about places where people feel comfortable together without continually being confirmed in their own views. In a pluralistic society, there is always potential for conflicting opinions, and libraries could play a role in facilitating public debate. Merely offering a meeting place is not enough. The public domain is never “finished”. It needs places where “meaningful friction” can take place (Hajer, 2018).

“ Freedom of expression is a political right of citizens vis-à-vis the government. This freedom involves being prepared to question your own opinion and to accept criticism from others. *That is public debate.* ”

(Daan Roovers, *Denker des Vaderlands* (“Thinker Laureate”), 2019)

Platform for civic participation

The significance of the library as a physical place that can bring a social and economic impetus to communities is a key theme in the research and reflections of policy-makers and academics. In recent years, “city labs” have been set up in many locations, sometimes with assistance from a library. The term “city lab” covers many different interpretations and applications. A city lab facilitates knowledge sharing and co-creation with citizens to find solutions to local issues and shape new policy. Due to their broad reach and their position in various societal networks, libraries are a platform for citizens and organisations, both physically and online. They can also play a role in local and regional news services and as centres for dialogue on local issues.

The value of the library building

Libraries are important for their symbolic value. As a central reference point for a local community, a library can contribute to a sense of pride, ownership and respect among residents. The presence of a library as part of a cultural infrastructure also boosts the local economy and creates an attractive climate that encourages people and businesses to settle there. The building of a new central or community library is sometimes the first step in regenerating local neighbourhoods or inner cities and improving their quality of life (Oomes, 2015).

Knowledge questions

Very little is known about the role libraries play in the social fabric of a city or village and the extent to which they actually contribute to bridging differences between population groups. It is important to understand the library's role in this respect, but gaining an idea of how this role could be realised in future is even more vital still. The aim of this theme is to explore how libraries are experimenting with new forms of public space that are freely accessible to all, while remaining recognisable as libraries and at the same time offering new possibilities to future users.

Public sphere

Libraries are important to the public sphere and people's commitment to their local community. They provide a place for encounter and discussion, and free access to information.

› How can libraries, as a public service, contribute to (renewing) the dialogue between citizens, and between citizens and organisations, and help to strengthen citizens' connections with the local community?

Building

Library buildings are not only functional, but also have symbolic value. Their role as a meeting place seems to be gaining in importance. People come to read, work, attend events and meet others, but also to step back from the everyday hustle and bustle or just go offline for a while.

› What values do library buildings represent for their environment, how is their use changing and what are the consequences of housing library facilities in multifunctional accommodations?

Platform for citizens and data

Libraries offer a platform for civic participation due to their local position and their combination of physical and online facilities. For example, they can serve as a hub for sensors in the city, collecting data for local issues, academic purposes and practical applications.

› How can libraries fulfil a role as a public data hub and be a platform for connecting citizens? And how can they organise their physical and online infrastructure accordingly?

Theme 2:

THE
INFORMATION
FUNCTION OF
THE LIBRARY IN
A DIGITAL
SOCIETY

The internet can provide the context for a public sphere and, in certain ways, fulfil the same functions as physical places. The internet could have provided a space where there is room for a democratic exchange of information, ideas and opinions. However, just as in the physical space public interests are increasingly being overshadowed by private interests. Citizens depend more and more on large commercial companies and social platforms to find, share and store information. These platforms mainly regard their users as data providers that can be exploited for commercial purposes. The realisation that public values, such as transparency, openness, sovereignty and responsibility, may be at stake is leading to a growing focus on reclaiming the public sphere within the virtual domain.

What consequences do the digitalisation and datafication of society have for the information function of the library?

Topics and trends

Growing information gap

For many people, it has become harder to find relevant and reliable information. They lack the skills to navigate the ever-expanding information landscape. Examples are the need for reliable information about medical conditions and healthy lifestyles, about public authorities, or the ability to critically assess fake news, misinformation or the influencing of the media. Information is by no means always freely accessible to all: it may be undigitised, or locked behind paywalls, or only available on devices that not all citizens own. Those who have access to new technology and know how to use it have an advantage over those who do not. The gap between people who can find their way around in the information society and others who continue to miss out on necessary information is growing.

Network society and platformisation

Digitisation, internet and social media have radically changed the circulation of information, but the digital transformation of public information provision has not yet fully succeeded. In the network society that the internet has created, platforms are the organising principle and data are the fuel. The mechanisms involved in platformisation (datafication, commodification and selection) have caused a shift in the relationships between market, consumer, citizen and government (Poell, Van Dijck and De Waal, 2016) and this has radically changed how information is distributed. Much of the free internet is currently in the hands of commercial players such as Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. In journalism and academia, a small club of providers are still able to regulate access to information by blocking certain content from their platform or placing it behind a paywall, although efforts to encourage open access in academia are starting to have an effect (Koens & Vennekens, 2019).



Public Spaces

Under the heading “Public Spaces”, a coalition of public broadcasters and cultural institutions is advocating the reclaiming of the internet as a public space where citizens are not viewed as vehicles for economic interests or as exploitable assets or data sources. The aim is to reduce dependence on the major commercial players by offering (open source) alternatives to software and platforms, based on public values. In other words, free from commercial or political interference and putting the citizen first again.

(PublicSpaces Manifesto, 2018)

Datafication

Datafication is the conversion of human actions into data. The interlinking of data flows and the organisation and distribution of data via platforms make it ever easier to track, predict and even control events and behaviour. The influencing of our behaviour goes beyond the offering of personalised advertisements. Smart technologies and sensors can be used to monitor all of our movements in the public space and online. Facial recognition technology is also steadily improving – once it is in widespread use, we will no longer be anonymous anywhere.

Commodification

Commodification means the converting of previously free goods into a marketable product. The same is being done with knowledge and information, and with our personal data: they have become merchandise. It is not only commercial companies that are hunting for data; governments and social institutions are doing so too, and sometimes working together. It is not always clear exactly what our data is used for, and whether that use is in line with personal and public interests, or driven by unilateral, commercial motives.

Selection by filters

The human brain is designed to confirm its own pre-existing beliefs. On the internet it is easy to find like-minded people, or arguments to support our own case, and thus to create our own truth (confirmation bias). Algorithms that seek to hold the user's attention for as long as possible will continue to feed people with more of the same. Together with the spread of fake news and misinformation, these mechanisms can adversely affect the free forming of opinions.

“ How do we return to a situation in which – separate from political convictions – we can jointly assume a shared reality in which factuality still plays a significant role? ”

(Hassler-Forest, 2017)

Applications of artificial intelligence (AI)

The use of algorithms for processing large amounts of data will increase in the coming years. Not only the collection and analysis of data, but also the taking of decisions based on that data, will be left to machines. To what extent can we leave decisions with far-reaching consequences to computers that may, on the one hand, be much smarter than humans but, on the other hand, lack the same capabilities, such as the ability to combine multiple perspectives or the capacity for doubt? A human error can sometimes be corrected faster than a wrongly stored item of data that goes on to lead a life of its own within interconnected systems.

Control of our own data

As the volume of citizens' private data that is collected, analysed and used grows exponentially, concerns about the privacy and ownership of data are growing too. Are people aware of their data being stored and for what purpose, do they know how those data can be recombined and shared, and by whom? How are data being used to monitor and control people's behaviour? A new digital divide is emerging: the data gap between those who do and do not have access to, and control over, their own data.



Data literacy

A person who is data literate is able to use data, understands what is being done with their data, can collect and use their own data, and is able and willing to defend the ownership of their data.

What does this mean for libraries?

Providing information, making it accessible and categorising it are tasks suited to libraries. Up until now, that information has been stored in books and other physical media. Digitisation of information and dissemination via the internet have shifted the focus of this role. The exponential increase in information, combined with uncertainty about its multiple forms and reliability, is prompting libraries to re-examine and redefine their role as guides.

Digital and information literacy

The ability to filter, select and interpret information is becoming increasingly relevant for several reasons. The volume of information is expanding ever faster, people have less time to filter information, and not everyone can cope with a complex information landscape. Public libraries have a role to play in the government's policy on digital inclusion. At present, services in this area are mainly aimed at improving the basic digital and other skills of vulnerable citizens. However, public demand is broader than that. Even the young, employed and well-educated might lack the skills to find and select information, check facts and critically judge misinformation (Bommeljé & Keur, 2013; CBS, 2018). Libraries can also help to raise awareness of the consequences of datafication.

“ Curation replaces noise with clarity. And it's the clarity of your choosing; it's the things that people you trust help you find. ”

(Rosenbaum, 2011)

Challenges of the digital society

In its report on safeguarding public values in society, the Rathenau Instituut introduces technological citizenship as *the* democratic challenge of the 21st century. A technological citizen, according to the report, “is well-informed about the workings of technology, is able to think critically about it and its significance for his living environment, and on that basis is able to choose which technology he does or does not wish to use. This means, for example, that people understand how profiling and machine-learning algorithms work and how that influences them, and are able to defend themselves against undesirable influences and choose alternatives.”

(Kool et al., 2017)

Applications of AI in the library

The application of AI touches on the traditional tasks of libraries, such as organising information and providing access to knowledge. The current flood of information cannot be contained in a closed library system, but algorithms can search through enormous volumes of unstructured data. For example, AI can be deployed by including certain works in the collection based on assigned keywords (Van Wessel, 2019). Analysis of reading and search behaviour can offer users with customised recommendations. Besides the opportunities that AI holds for improving and developing services, the library can play a role in fostering awareness and dialogue about the moral issues associated with AI.

Knowledge questions

In this theme, the aim is to understand the challenges that the digital and datafied society poses for the information function of libraries. The KB wants to explore how libraries fulfil their information function and support people in their citizenship and participation in the digital society.

Skills

An important part of this issue relates to the role that libraries play in equipping citizens – with skills and awareness – to navigate the information landscape.

› How can libraries contribute to citizens' digital, information and data literacy?

Reliability of information

Libraries have traditionally played a role in providing access to information sources. This role remains meaningful, especially where public values such as openness, accessibility and neutrality within the information landscape come under threat.

› How can libraries guarantee free access to pluriform information and reliable sources?


Serendipity

Thanks to technological developments, the provision of information can increasingly be customised. At the same time, libraries also have a role to play in encouraging the discovery of new perspectives, pluriformity and diversity.

› How can libraries contribute to valuable surprise discoveries if search results are driven by algorithms?

Theme 3:

THE LIBRARY AS
AN OPEN
CENTRE FOR
LEARNING AND
DEVELOPMENT



Technological innovations are radically changing our lives and the speed at which these occur raises uncomfortable questions. These accelerated developments are making modern life superficial and unpredictable. The imaginative powers of philosophers, artists and storytellers are needed to help us envision the impact of technology on everyday life in the near future. This implies a revaluing of skills that robots do not (yet) possess, such as creativity, empathy, personal initiative, teamwork and daring to fail. These skills are not always acquired in an educational context and are not confined to our working lives. Libraries face a challenge in transitioning from “knowledge as product” and “librarian as expert” to knowledge as a process of collaborative learning and creation.

How are the role and position of libraries in education changing and what is their contribution to personal development and fulfilment?

Topics and trends

Complex society

The issues of the modern age are so wide-ranging and complex that there are no simple, definitive solutions. “Wicked problems” demand new approaches, cutting across disciplines and traditional domains. Complex issues call for imaginative capacity and human creativity. This is reflected in the popularity of various new ways of “thinking” such as design thinking, visual thinking and the growing pressure to be of value to society: “impact thinking”.



Wicked problems

These are major issues that are complex and multi-faceted, with no one-size-fits-all solution. Wicked problems concern different stakeholders and perspectives and revolve around questions that cannot be solved with linear, step-by-step thinking.

Imagination required

As applications for AI expand and robots become a serious factor in the workplace, the demand for highly trained staff in science and technology is rising. There is a growing need for “imagineers” and creative thinkers due to their alternative view on things, boldness and urge to experiment. The aim is to offer a human experience in a machine society.

21st century skills

In primary and secondary education, different ways of thinking and learning are an integral part of the 21st century skills that have gained an important place in the curriculum of the future (SLO, 2019). The key is therefore to combine both old and new skills such as creative, critical and problem-solving approaches, teamwork, digital literacy, and social and cultural skills.

“ Anyone wishing to hold their own in an age of technological progress must become proficient in the skills that computers have not yet mastered. Although our computing and thinking power is rapidly being transferred to computers, our imagination remains for now beyond the reach of the smart algorithms. ”

(Van Mensvoort, 2019)

Increasing flexibility of work and learning

Demand for temporary staff and flexible contracts is increasing. People change jobs quicker or combine temporary employment with periods of self-employment. The retirement age is rising as well. Specialist knowledge is becoming outdated so fast that a completed education does not guarantee a successful career. To keep up with the latest developments, we need to continue learning throughout our careers (Van den Broek et al., 2016).

Merging of educational forms

There will be more demand for flexible education, customised learning routes for professional and personal purposes. Learning will more frequently take place outside the framework of institutional education, making use of apps, games, webinars and podcasts. The mixing of offline and online learning methods creates a new dynamic between the formal and non-formal tracks. As learning increasingly takes place outside of an educational context, greater consideration will have to be given to how the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning can be accredited.

Creating as a way of learning

Technological innovations have facilitated access to tools and made it easier for people to create products by themselves. Thanks to the availability of tools and materials and the sharing of information via the internet, today everyone can make their own things. Individual makers are designers, manufacturers and entrepreneurs all in one. “Maker spaces” are all about individuals creating, inventing, sharing and learning from each other. This calls for a maker’s mindset, an openness to unconventional ideas, a spirit of curiosity and the courage to fail time and time again, because sometimes we learn more from failures than from imitating successes. Maker spaces are more than just a room full of technological gadgets and equipment. They speak to our natural human need to create something, to learn by making.

What does this mean for libraries?

With a growing need for lifelong learning, we are also seeing a growth in public working spaces, online platforms and other opportunities for knowledge transfer. Libraries provide an open learning environment with access to resources, referrals, facilities and working spaces; they organise lectures, debates and courses and bring people with similar interests together. They also build bridges to educational institutions and encourage people to exploit the opportunities available to them.

Positioning

The library is just one of many players in a landscape that is characterised by an enormous degree of variety. Cooperation with formal education is increasingly taking professional shape in the form of programmes such as *De Bibliotheek op School (The Library at School)* and *BoekStart (BookStart)*. The range of courses for adults – facilitated nationally by the programme *De Bibliotheek en Basisvaardigheden (The Library and Basic Skills)*– involves extensive cooperation with social partners and adult education institutions. However, the field of informal and non-formal education is fragmented and, due to the boundless possibilities of digital learning, extends from local and national to international.

Inspiration and imagination

As open learning centres, many libraries offer activities in the area of basic skills. These activities are often focused on self-reliance and support for career development.

But the library is also a place where curiosity is stimulated by a wide range of collections and activities. Exposure to stories, artistic expressions and aesthetic experiences encourages thinking outside the box and introduces people to the irrational, emotional and chaotic.

Creating and collaborative learning

Maker spaces in libraries respond to changing needs and opportunities in the area of collaborative learning (see: Caso & Kuiper, 2019; Troxler, Visser & Hennekes, 2018; De Boer & Hermans, 2018). These are places where visitors create, invent, program and learn from each other. The idea is that valuable knowledge is “alive”, because it lies mainly in the people. The library is a platform where this knowledge can be developed and exchanged. The library can also provide a platform for the showcasing and distribution of user-designed products (see, for example, Jochumsen et al., 2012 & 2015).

“ These new social functions — which may require new physical infrastructures to support them — broaden the library’s narrative to include everyone, not only the “have-nots”. This is not to say that the library should abandon the needy and focus on an elite patron group; rather, the library should incorporate the “enfranchised” as a key public, so that the institution can reinforce its mission as a social infrastructure for an inclusive public, and so that privileged, educated users can bring their knowledge and talents to the library and offer them up as social-infrastructural resources.

(Mattern, 2014)

Knowledge questions

This theme centres around the curiosity and development of citizens. Citizens who want to learn and experiment and to pass their knowledge on to others. It is about equipping citizens with the knowledge and skills they need for professional purposes, but also about facilitating “makers” and people who want to learn based on a strong personal motivation. Learning is considered across the board: from young to old; at school, at work, in further education or retirement; in the classroom, at home or in a maker space.

Continuous learning lines

The boundaries between formal and informal learning are becoming blurred and learning can increasingly be customised. This gives people the opportunity to put together their own package of learning materials that matches their own learning objectives and need for personal development.

› How can libraries continue to stimulate citizens’ curiosity and help them to follow a continuous line of learning, career and personal life?

Learning and creating together

The library’s transition from a place that mainly houses collections to a place for creation and exchanges is associated with challenges and policy choices in terms of programming and budgets, personnel and layout.

› How can libraries be a platform for collaborative learning and creating, and what requirements does this impose on their physical and digital infrastructure?

Positioning and collaboration

Due to shifts in public demand and the requirements of information providers, the search is on to find the role that best suits libraries and to determine how they relate to other players.

› How can libraries offer space for learning, creating and experimenting in collaboration with partners?

IN CONCLUSION

The emphasis in this Knowledge Agenda is on new themes that have largely not yet been incorporated into existing research programmes. However, this does not mean that the Agenda will put an end to current research. In contrast to current research, the direction set out in these new themes will focus more on exploring topics that have not yet been embedded in policy but are expected to raise increasingly urgent questions in the near future. These overarching themes have been outlined to gain insight from research so that these urgent questions can be anticipated and responded to.

Connection

For the aforementioned themes, the KB research department seeks to connect with researchers from different disciplines who are associated with knowledge institutions. It is exploring ways to connect experts and academics to the public library sector. KB will continue its strong focus on knowledge sharing to improve the transfer of knowledge from research and encourage the translation of that knowledge into policy. Funding options are being explored and links are being sought with the research programmes of knowledge partners.

Moving forward together

The intention behind the Knowledge Agenda is to put new research themes on the agenda. The KB calls on researchers from different disciplines to explore topics from the Knowledge Agenda with a view to collaboration. Professionals from the sector are invited to share examples from their own working practice, so that the globally formulated themes can be specified in more detail.

Policy-makers from different domains are also invited to draw on insights from research in formulating and working out their policy issues. The KB hopes that this Knowledge Agenda for the public library sector will provide a framework to increase the value of research to and by the sector, and that exploring these themes it will ultimately contribute to the design of a sustainable library provision with social impact.

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