The public library in a knowledge-based economy

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Abstract
Predictions that the printed book, and the library with it, will have no place in a twenty-first century knowledge-based economy are likely to be premature, if not actually completely inaccurate. The role of the public library must necessarily be different in many ways from what we have known, but some things will stay the same. Books seem likely to hold their place in the mix of formats and content for leisure reading and to support formal education. However, if the public library is content to limit its role to these forms of book-based activity it will miss real opportunities to be a socially committed enabler for the knowledge economy. With this in mind IFLA FAIFE has been promoting library involvement in positive provision of public Internet access, access to health information and support for transparency, through a programme of workshops for librarians. The public library needs to widen its welcome and make its premises even more of a focal point for communities, whilst at the same time reaching out more effectively to those who may not feel the library provides a suitable offering for them. Outreach should include dissemination of information to the community and popular technology that can achieve this, notably the cell phone, must be exploited. Finally, the public library has a responsibility to promote community-wide information literacy, so as to enable intelligent and effective use of digital as well as print resources.