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.

Prof Paul Sturges' central professional commitment since the mid 1990s has been to Intellectual Freedom issues. He was consultant to the Council of Europe on freedom of expression and public access points to networked information, and also on library legislation, 1997-2001. He has been chair of the IFLA FAIFE Committee since August 2003.

He drew up the Council of Europe guidelines on Public access and freedom of expression in networked information (Council of Europe Publishing, 2001) and was Project Leader for the Privacy in the Digital Library Environment project, financed by UK Re:source 2000-2001 (Paul Sturges, et al. User privacy in the digital library environment: an investigation of policies and preparedness. *Library Management* 24, 2003, 44-50). He is author of Public Internet access in libraries and information services (*Facet*, 2002).

Sturges has travelled widely throughout the world, giving lectures and conference presentations, and leading workshops on Intellectual Freedom topics. His more than 150 articles, reports and books deal with a variety of issues in information science, with a strong emphasis on the developing world and Africa in particular. He is joint author with Richard Neill of *The quiet struggle: information and libraries for the people of Africa* (Mansell, 2nd ed., 1998); and joint editor (with John Feather) of the *International encyclopedia of information and library science* (Routledge, 2nd ed., 2003).