THE 21ST CENTURY LIBRARY

The future of Estonian librarianship in the face of social and technological changes: the mission, position and paths of development for libraries.

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries serve an important role in society – to help people orientate in our modern information society. As long as people read, culture will live on. The purpose of libraries is to help people be informed in their reading choices and thereby better able to manage in their lives.

The goal of this vision document is to analyze the current state of Estonian librarianship and the future trends affecting the field and to agree on the main strategic, developmental goals. The document is the basis for working out the detailed strategies for different types of libraries. The process involved more than thirty area specialists from different institutions and different regions in Estonia.

This vision document was drafted by the Estonian Librarians Association with support from the Ministry of Culture and Ragnar Siil, the Managing Partner of the creative economy think tank and consultancy group Creativity Lab, as advisor to the process.

FUTURE TRENDS

The development of librarianship and reading habits in the future is affected by several cultural, socio-demographic, political, economic and technological trends. The IFLA Trend Report from 2013 identified five top-level trends that will pay a key role in shaping librarianship in the future[1]:

1. New technologies will both expand and limit who has access to information. Technological developments will mean the value digital literacy skills will rise and the role of libraries will become to assist users who lack competence with digital tools. In doing so, it is also important to understand the competencies that libraries must develop in the future in order to be capable of guiding users in information society.

2. Online education will democratize and disrupt global learning. The rapid expansion in online education resources and programs will make learning opportunities more abundant, cheaper and accessible. The wealth of online learning resources, coupled with a rise in Open Access to materials stands to affect the development of services provided by libraries.

3. The boundaries of privacy and data protection will be redefined. The adoption of new technologies will evoke issues of personal data protection, including when it is used for economic purposes. For libraries, the questions of gathering, using and protecting user data become increasingly relevant.

4. Hyper-connected societies will listen to and empower new voices and groups. Mobile technologies and social media are connecting people and having an impact on communication, online participation and social inclusion. If libraries have long been

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[1] trends.ifla.org

vocal opponents of censorship in print, then what should be the new role of libraries in a digital society?

5. The global information economy will be transformed by new technologies. With the proliferation of online books making all books accessible online and automated translation programs potentially making any book in any language available to a user, there will be a significant impact on the services offered by libraries in the future.

The Center for the Future of Libraries of the American Library Association has identified 23 trends[2] that affect the way libraries will operate in the future, including:

- An aging society (effect on services offered, need to help people to manage in an information society);
- New forms of online learning (effect on services that promote lifelong learning, integrating libraries into curricula);
- The digital generation (their expectations for services offered differ from the previous generations');
- Drones and robots (effect on the way libraries work in the future, automated book return);
- Gamification (effect on digital literacy, opportunity to appeal to youth with attractive tools);
- Income inequality (the library's role in access to information regardless of user's income);
- Changes to data protection and privacy (use of data collected by libraries and personal data protection);
- Do-it-yourself initiatives and active involvement (rise in citizens' initiatives, need for new services, participatory development and implementation of new services);
- Growing urbanization (effect on the library network particularly in rural areas).

Futurologist and DaVinci Institute founder Thomas Frey published an article in 2015 titled "The Future of Libraries: Beginning the Great Transformation"[3] in which he brings out 10 trends that will affect libraries in the long term:

1. New technologies are continually changing the way people access information.
2. All technology ends. All technologies commonly used today will be replaced by something new.
3. We haven't yet reached the ultimate small particle for storage. But we will soon.
4. Search technology will become increasingly more complicated.
5. Time compression is changing the lifestyle of library patrons.
6. Over time, we will be transitioning to a verbal society.
7. The demand for global information is growing exponentially.
8. The stage is being set for a new era of global systems.
9. We are transitioning from a product-based economy to an experience based economy.
10. Libraries will transition from a center of information to a center of culture.

It is difficult to predict today what the world will look like in 10-20 years or even later. Thus, it's important to be flexible and ready for different scenarios, prepared to reduce the impact of negative trends in society and focused on the strengths that the field has to offer.
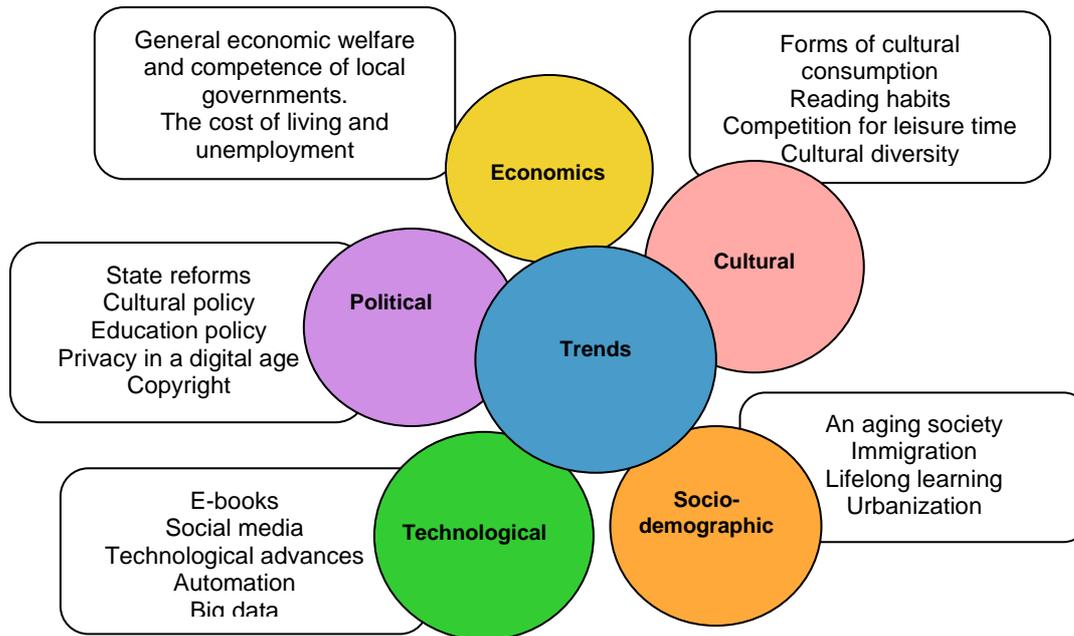
- **Cultural processes:** focus on the ways that cultural consumption is constantly changing and the increasing competition on leisure time; people's reading habits and ways of reading are changing; the internet and new technologies are causing a decrease in the ability to comprehend longer and more complicated texts.

- **Socio-demographic processes:** libraries can be affected by an increase in life expectancy and the accompanying trend towards an aging society; it becomes increasingly important to offer services to the elderly and to support lifelong learning; the diversification of society increases the need for integration programs.

- **Political processes:** the effect of significant reforms (i.e. state reforms, education reforms) on the field; developments in librarianship are affected by different policies (including cultural, educational, integration, social policies and many others), which means that libraries have the capability of positively affecting the ways that political goals are realized.

- **Economic processes:** libraries and their budgets are directly affected by the economic health of the state and local governments; additional pressure to cut costs hinders the ability to implement developmental activities; during times of economic crisis and as the society ages, the need for the services offered by libraries greatly increases.

- **Technological advances:** the way libraries function as far as availability and accessibility of information is directly affected by technological advances and the ability of libraries to adapt to changes is instrumental to the development of society; the advance of e-books affects the field, including the growing trend in self-publishing; new online learning materials and state services means libraries have to be ready to advise people on their use; future technologies, including robots and drones, may affect the way libraries offer their services.

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MISSION

The mission of Estonian libraries is to develop people's reading habits, support lifelong learning and ensure access to information, knowledge and culture. The result is a cultural, intelligent, self-sufficient citizen.

VISION

The 21st century library is a trustworthy, diverse, equal opportunity, inspirational information and cultural center that is guided by the needs of the user, ready to keep up with the times and able to react flexibly to societal and technological changes.
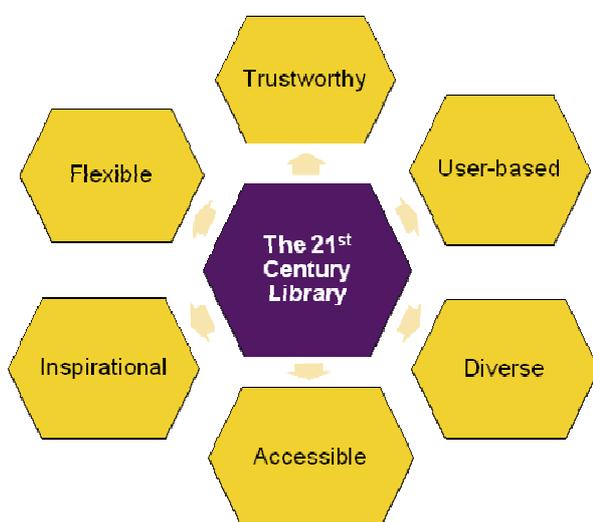
VALUES

Libraries base their everyday work and development of services on core values. The 21st century library is:

▸ TRUSTWORTHY: professional, impartial, high quality.

▸ USER-BASED: accommodating to different age and interest groups.

▸ DIVERSE: multifunctional, offering different options, a community centre.

▸ ACCESSIBLE: providing equal opportunity access to informational and cultural content.

▸ INSPIRATIONAL: engaging, attractive, active.

▸ FLEXIBLE: relevant and open to change.

CHALLENGES TO RESOLVE

▸ Libraries are internally fragmented and the field has thus far lacked a unifying, general vision. Libraries belong to different administrative levels and departments, which often makes decision-making slow and cooperation between decision-makers and libraries modest. The field uses different computer systems and software platforms (i.e. the three e-catalogs – ESTER, URRAM and RIKS), which are not compatible with each other.

▸ On a state level, policy and legislation affecting libraries is outdated.

▸ The marketing and public relations for the services offered by libraries isn't extensive or systemic enough.

▸ The physical environment in libraries isn't attractive enough and it doesn't bring in new (especially young) users.

▸ The level of library services and competence of library employees differs and the cleft between the competent and less competent libraries is substantial.

▸ There aren't enough new people entering the field – the level of pay isn't motivating so there aren't enough capable, young people being hired. There is a dearth of financial resources being directed towards professional development and training for library employees.

▸ Library employees lack adequate knowledge of new technology and preparedness to use it.

▸ The quality of management in libraries is inconsistent. There aren't enough training programs for library managers and the participation in the ones that do exist is meager. Librarianship is characterized by a lack of innovation and the conservatism of the system.

▸ State and local funding is low, which affects salaries, the ability to purchase materials and to invest in new technologies and developments.

DEVELOPMENTS UP TO THE YEAR 2020

The development of libraries is based on six primary areas of activity, which are interdependent and form an integrated action plan:
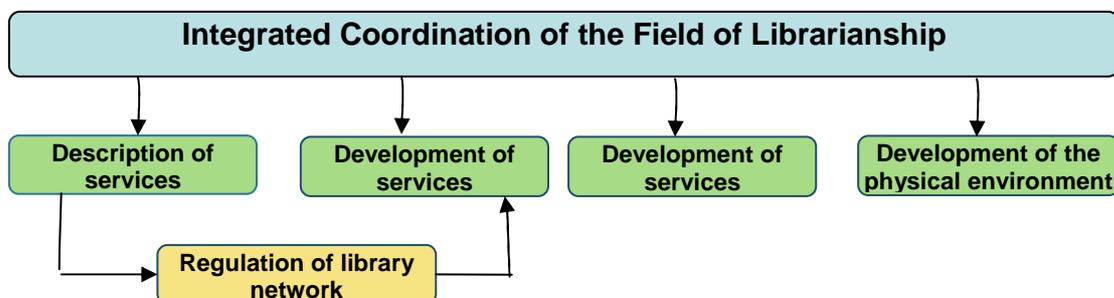
1. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

Primary activities:

- Library services are described on different levels, including basic services and supplemental services. Services are described according to four categories: (1) collections, (2) services, (3) competences and (4) rooms. Different levels are assigned based on those categories, and minimum levels are set.

- The description of services is used to determine the tenets of quality service and good governance in librarianship.

- Legislation is adjusted to include a more precise list of services offered by libraries.

2. REGULATION OF LIBRARY NETWORK

Primary activities:

- The library network is regulated based on the principle that the accessibility and quality of library services must improve after the changes are implemented.

- An analysis of the collections and services offered in the library network will determine the optimal number and location of libraries.

- Recommendations are made to update legislation in order to help the state and local governments offer quality library services.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES

Primary activities:

- The goals and responsibilities of various stakeholders in developing library services are identified, including for library owners (local governments, ministries and others), associations (including the Estonian Librarians Association and the Estonian Libraries Network Consortium), learning institutions, partners (including information systems developers) and others.

- Consideration will be given to the establishment of a common Library Services Development Center. This would increase the capability to initiate, plan and run large-scale projects and training programs (through long-term training plans).

- Practitioners with different competencies (including cultural workers, education and youth specialists, IT specialists, etc.) are involved in the development and offering of new services.

- A central system for national libraries is developed through the local and city central library network and the Library Services Development Center.

- The possibility for a common library software to be used by all libraries is analyzed. This includes opportunities to integrate this with the information systems of other memory institutions in order to simplify access for users. A common service platform will give users access to the collections of all libraries.

- Ensure the necessary IT support and access to e-collections for all Estonian libraries, including access to Estonian language e-books.

▸ Create the optimal conditions necessary for cultural consumption and leisure time activities (including reading).

▸ Shape the reading habits of children and youth through special library programs by financing the structures that promote this.

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4. TRAINING OF LIBRARY SPECIALISTS

Primary activities:

▸ The continued modernization of library studies in order to ensure that librarians/information specialists are prepared for the societal and technological developments taking place and for the resulting changing position of libraries, including the increased importance of social skills. Traditionally, librarians are knowledgeable about literature and specialists on information, but, in the future, they will also be advisors, trainers and initiators.

▸ The opportunities for on-the-job training in the field of librarianship must be increased, made more diverse and tied to the quality requirements and good practices of governance that will be developed for training.

▸ The professional standard for library employees will be updated to reflect the changing library environment.

▸ Development of practical bases for professional study, training and professional internships.

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5. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Primary activities:

▸ Libraries will be designed into multifunctional cultural and education centers that serve the different functions of a community center, including cultural, educational and social functions.

▸ Develop libraries into attractive, inspirational and cooperation-fostering places to read, spend time and partake in hobbies and lifelong learning – which also means offering different services and creating a new physical environment.

▸ If needed, then the cross-use or sharing of rooms with other institutions can be considered, including with cultural centers, educational institutions and community centers.

▸ Development of the technical capability of libraries, including investments in updating the computers, providing the additional equipment and software needed and ensuring that technical equipment continues to be constantly updated.

6. COORDINATION OF THE FIELD OF LIBRARIANSHIP

Primary activities:

▸ Decrease the fragmentation of the field and increase cooperation between libraries.

▸ Reinforce the coordination of activities implemented by the Ministry for Education and Science in their administration-level development of libraries.