IFLA TREND REPORT 2021 UPDATE

20 political, economic, social, cultural and technological trends to shape the future of our field and the communities we serve, as identified by emerging library leaders

INSIGHTS FROM THE

TREND
REPORT

IFLA is the Global Voice of the Library and Information Profession

IFLA puts libraries on the global stage and helps them develop.

We are the global voice and the largest brains trust of the library and information profession, with an active network of more than 1,500 Members – leading institutions and players in the library field – in over 150 countries, and well-established relations with the UN and other international organisations.

Together with our Members we work to set the professional agenda and develop standards in library service provision, to improve access to information and cultural heritage resources, and to place this work at the heart of local, national and global policies.

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WHAT IS THE IFLA TREND REPORT?

The original IFLA Trend Report is the result of the dialogue between the library field and experts from a range of disciplines.

By crossing experience and perspectives, it provided a new opportunity to explore and discuss the emerging trends that are shaping the world in which libraries work.

The first Report identified five high-level trends in the global information environment, spanning access to information, education, privacy, civic engagement and technological transformation. It did not seek to predict the future, but rather to explore the forces that will influence it.

Yet the Trend Report is not just a single static publication report, but a dynamic and evolving set of online resources for library and information professionals.

Alongside the original report, there is a range of data and information for libraries to use, share and build on, including a bibliography and literature review of existing trend reports, expert papers and discussion summaries.

Subsequent updates opened up new paths and questions for reflection, bringing in new voices from inside and outside of the library field.

These can all be found on the Trend Report website – trends.ifla.org.

Crucially, this is all intended as a starting point – a catalyst – for discussion both within the library field, and when talking with external partners. It is a support for thinking on how best to prepare for what is to come, so that libraries do not only survive, but thrive.

That is where you come in. How libraries respond to these trends will have a decisive influence on how big a role our institutions will play in the evolving information landscape. This is perhaps the most urgent question facing the profession today.

We encourage you to use the IFLA Trend Report Update to organise and facilitate creative workshops with your community, network, colleagues or staff.

Join the conversation online using the tag #IFLATrendReport, stay tuned to news from IFLA at ifla.org, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter!

Foreword - Barbara Lison
IFLA President 2021-2023

I am very happy to share with you the 2021 IFLA Trend Report Update!

This edition is built around my President-elect's session at the 2021 World Library and Information Congress, which brought together the presidential themes of my predecessor, Christine Mackenzie, and myself.

Christine's theme – Let's Work Together – shaped the Congress as a whole, underlining the importance of sharing ideas and collaborating in order to build innovation and resilience. My own theme – Libraries Building a Sustainable Future – emphasises the need to look forwards, and the close connection between the sustainability of our communities, our environments, and of our libraries themselves.

In reading this Update, you will find out more about the different potential trends that could shape this future, as suggested by emerging library leaders from around the world – the people who will be at the forefront of our field when they come to pass.

These reflections are essential. They help us reaffirm why our profession, our institutions, and our services matter. They help us reassess what we are doing now. And they help us open up new lines of discussion and collaboration. I would be glad if you would take them into account for the development of your future professional development.

Throughout my Presidency, I am looking forward to continuing these discussions, to working with the members of our field, wherever you are, at all career stages, to help build this more sustainable future for our communities, for our libraries, for our Federation.

My thanks go to all those who submitted ideas, as well as to Rashidah Bolhassan, Heba Ismail, Andreas Mittrowann, Kay Raseroka, and of course IFLA's Secretary-General Gerald Leitner and the IFLA staff for making my President-elect's session at the 2021 World Library and Information Congress such a success.

Happy reading!

Introduction - Gerald Leitner
IFLA Secretary General

Welcome to the 2021 Update of IFLA's Trend Report!

After a year's break, we are happy to share a new edition, setting out ideas and suggestions that we hope will support long-term thinking and reflection in the library field, at all levels.

Without doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a shock, with few anticipating its scale and impact on our communities, our institutions and our profession. Yet it is also clear that it is far from over, with each day taking us further away from what we viewed as normal before. It seems unlikely that we will ever be completely free of COVID, or return to just how things were previously.

This is not all. The pandemic has come on top of existing evolutions – and in some cases crises – which were already having an impact on the work of libraries. In some cases, these evolutions have even interacted with the effects of COVID-19, increasing, lessening or transforming their effects.

Crucially, the pandemic – just like other developments in our world – has been a test of our ability to adapt to change, and to show resilience, imagination, and innovation. This ability will be crucial if our field is to continue to play a central role in delivering sustainable development into the future.

We are lucky, as a field, to benefit from a millions-strong body of professionals and other library and information workers committed to delivering meaningful access to information as a driver of development. Their collected experiences, insights and energy of the field are a vital resource in ensuring that we are ready to face this future.

Already, through IFLA's Global Vision, Ideas Store and Strategy, it has been possible to draw on this in order to redesign and refocus IFLA's own work for the future.

Yet a Strategy can never be an end point. The IFLA Strategy, supported by our new governance structures, is there to enable the library field to continue to mobilise to plan and prepare for the future, in the most inclusive, effective and transparent way possible. Our Vision – of a strong and united library field powering literate, informed and participatory societies – is one for the long-term, and it is on this that we must focus.

IFLA's original Trend Report in 2013, and the subsequent updates in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, all aim to provide fuel for this reflection.

Following on from our 2019 edition, which drew on the insights presented by speakers at the President's Session at that year's World Library and Information Congress, this edition too offers an opportunity to dig deeper into some of the ideas aired and shared at this year's WLIC.

The bulk of this year's report is focused on the 20 Trends derived from the inputs received from emerging leaders earlier in 2021.

These Trends all represent possible directions in which our societies and our field could evolve. None are certain to come to pass, and those that do will interact and sometimes clash with others, in order to shape the future.

Following the trends, there are shorter sections setting out how the President-elect's session at WLIC was run, and potential variations on this, as well as links to videos submitted by a selection of the emerging leaders who participated in the consultation process.
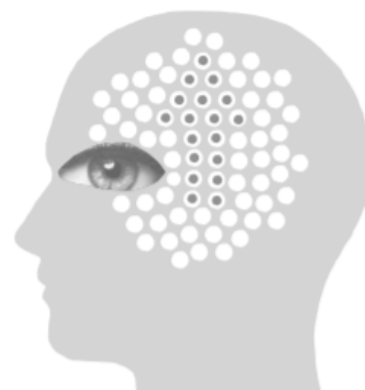
I would like in particular to thank sincerely all those who contributed the ideas that helped shape this report, as well as the others who submitted ideas anonymously. The trends suggested here should not be attributed to any one individual.

#IFLATrendReport

20 Trends

Through a survey in June and July of 2021, IFLA asked emerging library leaders to identify the trends that they thought would shape the library field over the coming ten years, and how. These ideas were analysed by IFLA Headquarters, and twenty overall trends identified in order to support reflection at the (then) President-elect's session at the 2021 World Library and Information Congress.

The trends as set out here are of course only one way of dividing up the rich and diverse set of ideas received. Some are broad, talking about general shifts in politics and society, while others are more specific to libraries themselves.

Moreover, there is often overlap between trends, and in some cases conflict. This is not surprising – many of the evolutions in our economies and societies are the result of different trends and tendencies coming together, creating a number of possible outcomes.

In each case, a high-level scenario is set out based on the ideas received, followed by further insights from our contributions, including around potential responses. The trends are often open-ended, representing a direction of travel, rather than a specific end-point. It is when trends come together that specific future scenarios can be defined.

#IFLATrendReport

1 TOUGH TIMES AHEAD!

A slow recovery from COVID will put pressure on all forms of public spending, requiring libraries to intensify advocacy efforts

Contributors highlighted the risk that short-term needs by governments to find savings (especially in countries without access to borrowing, such as small island developing states) could combine with the (incorrect) belief that thanks to technology, libraries are less necessary than before.

In particular, they noted concerns that the automation of some library tasks could lead to a sense that fewer staff are necessary, creating a more competitive job market. Added to this, others underlined that technology comes with its own costs, not just for initial purchase, but also for ongoing maintenance and updates. Especially in a constrained resource environment, this could also lead to further pressure on spending for other activities.

In terms of how to respond, many emphasised the need to move library advocacy up a gear, and to realise the objective of making every librarian an advocate. To strengthen this advocacy, we need to get better at showing our value, drawing on possibilities to evaluate the impact of our work on the communities we serve.

This advocacy should be aimed not just at decision-makers themselves, but also at broader communities and potential partners.

Furthermore, making libraries an integral part of different ministries', agencies' and organisations' strategies could help ensure a brighter future, and would also help ensure that libraries are better able to understand and respond to needs. To do this, libraries may need to work more to align (or demonstrate alignment with) the priorities of governments, sponsor institutions and others.

These sorts of efforts would be needed at every level – the local, regional, national and global – wherever decisions were being made.

2 VIRTUAL IS HERE TO STAY

People continue to prefer to access library services remotely, putting into question the value of spaces and physical offerings

For many contributors, it was clear that delivery of services to users at distance would continue to be the norm. The Pandemic had already forced a reflection on how to deliver services, but it was a further step to move from a logic of temporary to one of permanent remote provision.

Contributors saw both potential positives and negatives in this. On the positive side, a number noted that digital tools did offer new possibilities to offer more personalised services, making a reality of concepts such as student-centred learning. There were also exciting possibilities to provide access to a wider range of content in a wider range of ways, making it easier to respond to diverse needs.

Furthermore, several contributors suggested that the shift to virtual could also enable libraries to fulfil their potential to be centres not just for knowledge management, but also knowledge creation, with more emphasis on producing and communicating digital content and services.

At the same time, in a point echoed in Trend 10, the full potential of virtual is only likely to be available where both libraries and users have the hardware and skills necessary. Moreover, the shift to virtual also risks putting libraries in closer competition with other online services for people's attention. In order to be able to retain 'market share', libraries would need to pay more attention to technological trends, understand their implications, and react appropriately.

Otherwise, as already highlighted under Trend 1, there was a risk of decision-makers seeing a weaker justification for providing financial support for libraries, especially for the upkeep of physical library locations. Furthermore, the provision of virtual services raises questions about how to protect key rights, not least privacy given that libraries often rely on third party vendors.

3 THE COMEBACK OF PHYSICAL SPACES

People rediscover the value of spaces that offer opportunities for meaningful exchange and discussion

Some contributors felt that people would be only too happy to return to physical spaces and encounters with others in their communities as restrictions are lifted. Indeed, with a broader trend towards smaller and more individual housing and less communal living, the importance of places for social connection and activities could grow. Indeed, with many governments choosing to keep libraries open even as other services remain closed, this could even be the case now, although this type of usage of libraries would necessarily be limited by the need to protect the health and wellbeing of staff and users alike.

The place of libraries within communities also appeared in a number of contributions, suggesting the need for a new reflection on how to engage with the local environment and other local actors, including businesses. By providing spaces for active engagement with information, discussion, and the taking of decisions, libraries could help support the development of appropriate responses to local issues.

Several contributors underlined that physical spaces and technology were not mutually exclusive – rather the two could complement each other

effectively. For example, libraries could provide a 'sandpit' where people could experiment and interact with technology without risk or undue cost, for example in the form of makerspaces. Indeed, as collections move online, this could free up space in libraries for other high-impact activities. This would complement libraries' existing role in developing locally relevant collections and supporting social cohesion and identify at the local level.

There was a sense, however, that the effectiveness of use of physical spaces could not be taken for granted. It was not enough simply to be a place which offered free WiFi and storytimes, although these clearly were important – rather we needed to think of the sociological role of librarians, and how they could act as facilitators and mediators for positive outcomes in their communities. Similarly, there is a constant need to think about how to keep physical spaces attractive, useful and accessible for all.

Finally, as one contributor noted, this trend may still very much be something for the future, with many people cautious or simply unable to return to physical library spaces, creating new questions about inclusion and reach.

4 THE RISE OF SOFT SKILLS

At a time of rapid evolution in technologies, it becomes more and more important for librarians to be able to innovate and adapt to unpredictable situations

Across economic sectors, the increasing value both of 'soft skills', as well as the ability to learn and retrain is already well acknowledged, and the library profession is no different. As the materials we hold and give access to, the tools we have, and the needs and expectations of communities evolve, it is important to have the skills that allow us to evolve with them.

Specific types of 'soft' skill highlighted by contributors include resilience, agility, flexibility, building community confidence, partnership-building, problem-solving, and an ability to respond positively to the unexpected. A number stressed the need in particular for innovation and creativity, with new roles emerging for people with an arts background.

Some contributors also highlighted the importance of critical thinking within the profession around broader trends in society, not least those driven by the uptake of digital technologies. Having such a broad perspective can both help maintain focus, and make sense of the changes we are seeing on a day-to-day basis.

Similarly, there is a need to be attuned to popular culture, as well as to how different generations interact with information and learn. The ability to understand and respond to individuals' needs, drawing on emotional intelligence, in order to support their wellbeing, and to help them develop the meta-literacies needed to become active participants in the information society was clear.

In order to do this, responses underlined the value of working closely with colleagues, including across borders and types of institution, in order to identify trends and solutions. More broadly, continued professional development needed to be given the priority it deserved.

5 DIVERSITY TAKEN SERIOUSLY

A growing awareness of the existence and impacts of discrimination leads to a radical reform of our collections, services and practices

Contributors underlined that recent events have shone a new light on the need to give the promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion a greater priority if we are to make them a reality. This is an issue in terms not only of how libraries can contribute to a better society, but of how we work ourselves.

This is both an ethical question – it cannot be acceptable to discriminate unjustifiably between groups or individuals in terms of levels of service offered – but also one of performance. If libraries' success is measured in terms of their ability to help all members of the communities they serve to fulfil their information needs and realise their potential, any exclusion of individuals, consciously or otherwise, is a failure.

To succeed, we will need to continue to develop tools and skills allowing us to identify differing needs effectively, as well as the impacts of libraries' current practices and service offerings. There is also value in understanding how we can assess the diversity of collections, and respond where gaps are found. Cataloguing experts are likely to play an important role in doing this. We need also to build expertise around design thinking and accessibility.

Technology does offer interesting possibilities here. Already, it has opened up new possibilities for people with disabilities, but there is still potential to be realised in terms of modulating service delivery to maximise its positive impact. Similarly, technology has also created opportunities to ensure the preservation of, and access to, a much more diverse and inclusive range of heritage. At the same time, the need to respect rights (not least to privacy) and avoid excluding the unconnected, as already mentioned, also come into play.

Key to responding here will be to look at the diversity of the library field itself. In some countries at least, there is a growing awareness of how choices made in the past have created patterns of discrimination which now urgently need to be tackled. Doing so will not only deliver on a fundamental responsibility of the field not to discriminate, but also help build our ability to meet the needs of diverse communities. Learning how to do this effectively is likely to be a key theme in the months and years to come.

6 AN ENVIRONMENTAL RECKONING

Climate change brings new threats to libraries and the communities they serve, forcing radical adaptation in order to avoid disaster

Libraries will not be spared the impacts of climate change, in the form either of gradual environmental changes or the extreme weather events that can cause so much damage to lives and collections.

Concerning library buildings, there will likely be an important role for new architectural guidelines, enabling libraries better to withstand threats while also promoting energy efficiency. Comprehensive risk management will be important, in order to avoid irreplaceable losses.

However, contributors also saw an important role for libraries in helping to promote behaviour change and wider climate empowerment, in line with a broader mandate to engage in social issues. As well as wider awareness-raising, and the example that can be set through green library buildings, there is a particular potential role in spreading the knowledge necessary for mitigation or adaptation, for example in rural and agricultural communities. In these areas, adopting new practices can both help reduce emissions, and help people cope with their changing environment.

Moreover, the heritage that libraries hold can contribute here, giving insights as to alternative ways of doing things which may well prove more respectful of the environment.

Policies to address climate change may well lead to a need for reskilling, linked to decarbonisation, the rise of green industries, and a possible return to the local, with a greater share of production and consumption taking place nearby. In both cases, workers are likely to need access to programmes that can help them develop new capacities or, at a more meta level, ensure they have the skills (such as literacy) that enable them to learn – see Trend 14 for more.

Of course, to manage this, both funding and other forms of support will be needed, in order to ensure that physical changes to library spaces can be delivered, and staff are ready and confident to play their part here.

7 A MOBILE POPULATION

With people ever more nomadic, the concept of a 'local' library becomes less relevant, and the need to provide joined-up services across borders rises

Contributors noted that a key consequence of climate change not already mentioned under Trend 6 is the likelihood that more people are likely to need to move from where they currently live. Many areas will become uninhabitable due to rising sea levels or increasing temperatures, while economic changes will likely oblige people to seek work – and so housing – elsewhere.

This will combine with existing factors driving mobility, such as conflict, persecution and poverty, which also see people obliged to flee their homes.

In parallel with this, the experience of remote working during the pandemic has also raised the possibility of a world where people are much less tied to an individual place, and can rather share and apply their expertise anywhere. Of course, this may be more of a possibility for the wealthy than for others, who may well have fewer options.

In terms of impacts on libraries, this can create a need to be able to serve more globalised users who do not necessarily have permanent residence. In particular in situations where library membership depends on residency, there may a need to look at how to be more flexible in allowing access to library resources and services.

This situation may also require the delivery of services not just remotely, but also across borders, raising both technical and potentially copyright issues. At the same time, it also raises the possibility of libraries growing in importance as co-working spaces in the community for people without a set workplace.

8 THE IMPATIENT USER

Library users, in particular from younger generations, expect the most modern technologies and service, and risk turning away from libraries if they cannot find them there

Contributors suggested that libraries need to be aware of, and respond to, the changing needs and expectations of users, and in particular the risk that younger users will not tolerate slow or confusing processes. Some argued that there may even be falling interest in traditional services, as well as a lack of desire to take the time to visit a physical library building (as already highlighted in Trend 2).

A potential consequence of this is that if people do not find the quality information they need, they will rapidly turn to other, less reliable sources. This would not only be a problem for libraries, but also for society as a whole (see Trend 18).

One step proposed is to work towards developing simpler, more unified platforms which avoid users needing to log in multiple times. This is already a model pursued by major internet platforms (as well as by shadow libraries, such as Sci-Hub), and which can be seen as a reason for their success. Such a platform could even help people identify the nearest library to them, if they need to use physical resources.

Furthermore, a number of contributions highlighted the potential of the personalisation of services as a response, making use of technology to offer an experience better tailored to individual expectations and needs. Some argued that artificial intelligence could help in this respect, providing better targeted responses to requests, although there were also concerns about risks of bias, limitation of freedom of access to information, and privacy.

Also drawing on technology, contributors noted the potential for bots to respond to questions, as well as to provide a 24/7 service, at distance. Similarly, social media and networks could also provide a more effective means of reaching users where they are.
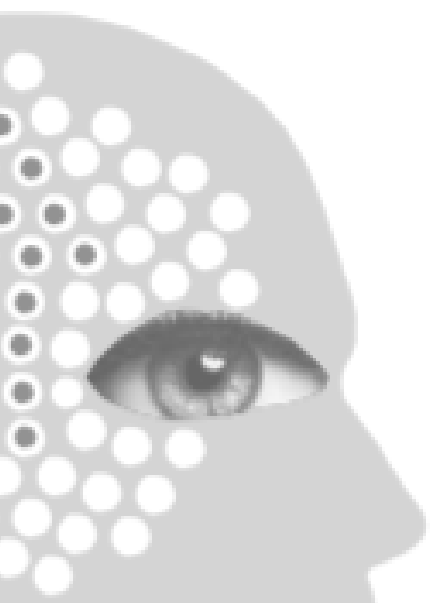
9 THE ANALOGUE BACKLASH

A new generation, traumatised by the stresses of constant social media connectivity, rediscovers physical resources – including books – as an escape

Many contributions received highlighted that, especially with the experience of the pandemic, people were growing more and more aware of the limitations of digital tools. We should not see technology as a cure-all, or an end in itself, but rather as one tool among others.

Indeed, there was a sense that sometimes technology has been over-sold, and that it is time for the pendulum to swing back towards more analogue ways of doing things. This could include a re-evaluation (and new appreciation) of traditional roles and activities.

In particular, contributors worried that people needed help dealing with the fast pace of modern life, as well as the risk of more shallow interactions digitally. They risked also suffering from the narrowness of an online experience dominated by a small number of platforms designed to grab and retain attention.

In both cases, analogue, physical experiences could provide an antidote. Expanding on some of the themes already covered in Trend 3, it was suggested that libraries could be particularly powerful as places for mindfulness and promoting mental balance, or even as 'safe spaces' away from social media.

As already highlighted earlier, it was also anticipated that many would welcome the opportunity to be together again in person. As societies open up again, and people shift from a globalised yet individual online life to a local-collective physical one, libraries could be key both as a space, and as centres for driving wellbeing and community spirit.

Parallel with this, contributors underlined the continued importance of physical collections, and the value that these have both for their content, and their format. Reading a physical book remains, for many, a very different – and richer – experience to reading on a screen.

10 SCALE MATTERS

The cost of providing full and modern services means that it is only possible for larger institutions to do so, leaving smaller ones behind

A number of trends highlighted so far have referred to the potential of technology, not least in order to respond to the evolving expectations of users. However, the possibility to realise this is not necessarily equally distributed across the field, with smaller institutions in particular at risk of being unable to respond.

In particular, given the rapid pace of technological change, existing equipment and services are rapidly outdated and need to be replaced. Furthermore, there are ongoing costs associated with licensing fees and updates. Finally, in order to use available tools effectively, there is also a need for ongoing training and support for library staff. All imply a need for investment.

Contributions therefore highlighted the concern that we risk seeing two classes of library – those that are able to keep up (often the bigger, better resourced ones), with staff receiving the support needed to work with new tools, and those that are left behind. Indeed, one contributor underlined that this divide had become more apparent during the pandemic, with

better supported libraries able to shift to remote services, while less wealthy ones were effectively forced into hibernation. The risk was that those libraries which are already struggling could face falling use, and so growing questions about their viability.

Responses to this proposed by contributors included a new drive to work in networks, allowing smaller institutions to benefit from new technologies at a very low marginal cost. This could certainly help provide a solution to questions of access to services and content, but does not remove the need for equipment and good connectivity. The rise of 'open' (see Trend 19) could also help in some ways, although once again, could not solve every issue.

Also linked to the idea of working in networks, one contributor suggested that better data collection and assessment could also help wider library systems better identify those branches that were struggling, and where help could be targeted.

11 DATA DOMINATION

New uses and applications of data change our economic and social lives dramatically, making it more and more essential for people to become data literate in order to cope

The growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) and other applications of data in our daily lives featured in many of the contributions received. In particular, data is at the heart of the drive towards more individualised services, which aim to analyse past behaviour (both of any one user, and of users in general) in order to make predictions for the future, and in particular what will respond best to someone's needs or interests. Of course, similar tools already serve to target advertising and even shape what we see on the internet or other services when we turn them on.

One contributor underlined in particular that focus on the individual in such data-driven models can also lead to potential disruption in how we think and work as humans within a societal context, given that we are defined more by our own characteristics (as coded for use in algorithms) than the connections between us.

Other contributions argued that better use of data can also strengthen efforts to assess and evaluate the impact of library services. Instead, there are possibilities to look at what is really happening, not just what is assumed by professionals, or reported by individuals. At the same time, such uses needed both to respect privacy, and be conscious of the risk of bias or replicating existing inequalities or forms of discrimination.

With data playing such a key role in how we experience the world and different services, contributors therefore underlined how important it is to understand data, and in particular where AI is being applied, and what it may mean. This is, arguably, an important new dimension of information literacy, both in the context of effective research skills, and in life more broadly. For libraries, there is a potential role to play in building awareness of how to use data ethically in order to support effective research and new scientific insights.

Moreover, recent data protection laws have given new rights to individuals to take decisions about how their data is used (individual data governance). However, the effectiveness of such measures depends on whether people take up the possibilities now open to them. Here, as elsewhere, there is a pressing need to ensure that it is not just the better off or those with more formal education who can understand and use these options. This could be another opening for libraries.

12 SEARCH TRANSFORMED

Artificial intelligence revolutionises the way in which we find information, making it possible to provide more and more accurate results for users

As already highlighted in Trend 11, artificial intelligence (AI), powered by machine learning, is reshaping the way that we experience the online world. In particular, it has had strong applications in the world of search – an area where libraries of course have long experience.

Contributors noted the potential to use AI in libraries in order to deliver deeper intelligence and insights into trends that could in turn help ensure better fitting responses to information needs. In this way, library users could benefit more fully from the potential of the semantic web. Such tools were more and more valuable given the volume of information now available.

Crucially, AI tools offer new opportunities to stay informed and updated, despite the rapid pace of information creation. Indeed, they may be essential in order to ensure discoverability of content – simply publishing material on the internet is no guarantee that it will get read.

Contributors nonetheless did caution against over-stating the potential of AI to improve search. As already highlighted, the collection and application of data necessary to train AI raises questions about privacy which should be addressed in order to ensure that resulting services are legitimate.

On a more fundamental level, AI-supported results are only as good as the design of machine learning programmes and the information fed in – there are plenty of opportunities for inaccuracies to creep in and distort results. Under-estimating these risks could easily lead at best to mistakes being made, and at worst, to the perpetuation or even deepening of inequalities and injustice.

Finally, echoing the point made in Trend 10, there is the ongoing risk that the potential to use AI effectively may also depend on the level of resourcing of individual libraries, and the investment made in the skills of their staff. Such skills are particularly important if new search tools are to be used with full awareness of their limitations.

13 RACE TO THE EXTREMES

Political debate becomes more polarised, making it more difficult to find consensus in politics and society alike, undermining the case for shared institutions

Contributors highlighted a broader social and political trend which risked having a significant impact on libraries and their missions: the apparent increasing polarisation of society. In particular, they noted a tendency among some at least to become more dismissive of the views of people they disagree with, rather than seek to engage and understand other positions, and come to consensus. In parallel, we have seen declining trust in professions which previously benefited from relatively high levels of respect, including journalists, researchers, and even doctors.

This has all had the effect of putting into question the base of knowledge on which political and civic discussion can take place, making the search for solutions far more difficult. This decline in trust has also undermined the effectiveness of policies based on changing and shaping behaviour, not least the response to the pandemic. Without the desire or ability to come to agreement, there is the risk of weakening the sense of a shared community and society on which many institutions are built.

Over time, we risk seeing more populist forces come to the fore, based more on the strength of their opinions and simplicity of their arguments than on any evidence-base or respect for human rights.

Libraries themselves risk being dragged into these debates, both very directly in disputes about the books they can hold in their collections (a very real challenge already in some countries), and indirectly as public services as a whole are brought into question. There is, arguably, a particular threat to institutions focused on promoting reflection, broadening horizons, and upholding the rights of all, none of which appear as high priorities for populists.

However, contributors also saw a more positive potential outcome, with libraries reaffirming the importance of reading widely, and taking a truly independent and informed position. Libraries could act as lighthouses – democratic spaces of knowledge promoting participation, collaboration and transparency. As Trend 18 points out, the importance of information literacy could finally be properly recognised.

Such a position would imply investment of efforts, and potentially also risks, but could also contribute to safeguarding the place of libraries in society into the future.

14 LIFELONG LEARNERS

There is no such thing as a job for life any more, meaning that more and more people need to retrain throughout life. Libraries intensify learning activities in response

Contributors underlined that we are already in a period of rapid economic and technological change, which seems unlikely to slow down any time soon in the light of the need to adopt more sustainable ways of living and working.

As already highlighted in Trend 6, one impact of this is likely to be a major shift in the types of job that are available for people. Decarbonisation will lead to the end of some industries and the transformation of others. Greater use of technology will replace some activities, but could allow for the emergence of new ones, or at least leave more space and time for them. So too will demographic change. A re-localisation of economic activities could lead to the decline of larger economic centres, but also more diverse possibilities for work within communities.

A common thread throughout this will be the need for people to train and retrain throughout their lifetimes in order to take up – or create – the new roles available. Contributors underlined that a prior condition for lifelong learning is that everyone has

the basic literacy skills needed to engage with learning materials, as well as fundamental digital skills.

Beyond this, echoing the points made in Trend 4 concerning the library field itself, people would need soft skills, including resilience, the ability to engage with new ideas, and to live in dignity and harmony with others. Sustainability literacy would arguably also be part of the skill-set required.

A number of contributions saw this trend as an opportunity, creating possibilities for libraries to reaffirm their role as learning centres, both within communities and institutions such as schools, universities and other organisations. In parallel, librarians themselves would come to be seen more and more as educators. To realise this, there would be a need to access and make effective use of platforms and resources, as well as to ensure that library and information workers receive adequate training and support.

15 A SINGLE, GLOBAL COLLECTION

With digitisation of resources and possibilities to work across institutions, it is no longer so relevant to talk about local collections, but rather access to universal resources

A number of contributions highlighted the trend towards a growing globalisation of collections. While inter-library loan and other forms of resource sharing have always meant that no collection was necessarily hermetically sealed, there are now new possibilities to allow researchers and others to work with a much wider selection of materials, held across different libraries.

Contributors painted a picture of a digitised system, with libraries and their collections fully connected to each other across frontiers, bringing us closer to a reality where library users really can access the memory and insights held in our institutions globally. With users familiar with an internet that (seemingly) operates regardless of borders, this would also help avoid the risk of libraries seeming siloed or stuck in the past. It could also help match the trend towards more footloose users, less tied to any one area (Trend 7).

Working in such a way also offers new possibilities to derive insights that can help address key issues, not least climate change, and support foresight efforts aimed at increasing our readiness for the future, by bringing together wider pools of information. They could also help increase the use – and so the perceived relevance – of unique materials held in smaller collections. Some suggested that this globalisation it could even be the trigger for a new dynamism, a refocusing of libraries towards using data and information at scale in order to develop new ideas.

Achieving this will take effort, as those involved in linked open data will already attest. It will, obviously enough, require collaboration in order to allow for the integration of different systems, or the acceptance and application of common standards. As highlighted in Trend 8, any resulting interfaces and platforms will also need to be well-designed and simple, in order to do justice to the work that has gone into bringing collections together.

16 THE PRIVATISATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The use of technological tools, as well as slow reforms to copyright, mean that it is possible for private actors to restrict and control information, even at a granular level, obliging permissions and payments

Contributors highlighted worries about efforts to put up new barriers around information. Technology certainly permits this, as do the terms of contracts that libraries and users need to sign in order to access digital materials (in contrast to the greater freedom when a physical work is bought outright). This situation is facilitated by copyright laws that do not seek to protect user rights around digital content.

Beyond immediate blocks on what libraries can acquire, contributions also highlighted the lack of certainty that a failure to update copyright laws can cause, for example around newer uses which are nonetheless in line with traditional library missions, such as text and data mining. Limiting possibilities for analysis or other uses could end up driving a new divide between those with and without the resources to 'buy certainty' by paying for supplementary licences.

This has created significant threats to the ability of libraries to ensure that every user has the chance to benefit from access to published materials. This in turn has impacts on sustainability, in terms of libraries'

power both to reduce social and economic inequalities, and to support the most inclusive possible research efforts to address the (environmental) challenges we face.

One contributor highlighted particular concerns around blockchain, and the impact that this could have on the circulation of knowledge when this can be ever more strictly controlled and monetised. The 'micro-contracts' associated with copyrighted works on blockchain seem unlikely to be able to appreciate the uses permitted under exceptions and limitations to copyright, and so block or monetise them by default.

Libraries are long-time members of the movement pushing for greater openness as an antidote to the privatisation of knowledge. There is growing awareness of the role that library publishing in particular can play in building the 'knowledge commons'. This offered opportunities to explore new models, focused on access, rather than profit maximisation for the purposes of benefiting shareholders or cross-subsidising other activities.

17 QUALIFICATIONS MATTER

As the complexity of the information environment increases, the need for library workers to benefit from a high level of education also rises

As already highlighted in Trend 4, the skill-set required by librarians to fulfil their potential and that of their institutions is evolving. For a number of contributors, this needed to go hand in hand with a stronger focus on qualification and professionalisation in the sector, not least when it comes to ensuring that all libraries are staffed by at least one qualified librarian. Indeed, as one person underlined, skills and training were often what made the difference between a library being a storehouse for books, and a dynamic research, education and civic hub.

Concerning what qualifications might cover, in addition to the soft skills already mentioned under Trend 4, contributions proposed a number of areas which could potentially become more important in future as part of any librarian's knowledge base. A number of these are already mentioned in other trends highlighted in this report, and could help ensure that new librarians entering the profession are better equipped both for the world they face, and able to adapt to further changes.

These include higher digital skills, enabling full use of digital tools to deliver user-centred services, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) skills, coding and programming, sustainability and environmental literacy, and the ability to assess community and user needs and respond accordingly. Librarians also needed to be trained to deal with new types of material, including open access content and digital libraries, and to learn to be effective advocates.

Ensuring greater recognition of the work of librarians, and salaries to match, could help attract and retain talented people, further boosting the ability of the field to deliver on its missions. Ongoing opportunities for learning and certification of skills, as well as creating and holding open leadership tracks would also help keep people inside the field.

18 INFORMATION LITERACY VALUED

Governments and others recognise fully the importance of information literacy as a long-term response to the rise of misinformation

Trend 13 noted the potential of a race to the extremes in political and civic discourse, and the impact that this could have on social cohesion and the institutions that rely on this. As set out, this poses a direct challenge to governments in the short term which are trying, on the basis of scientific evidence, to encourage people to act in ways that are responsible towards other citizens and the environment.

Contributors suggested that the significant negative effects of misinformation and conspiracies spread through social media during the pandemic is likely to lead to a new awareness of the need to act, and build up people's own defences against lies and fabricated stories. More people than ever – both in governments and in general – are aware that information literacy is a vital skill, and one that cannot be neglected.

In particular, given the downsides of more forceful measures (such as trying to ban or block sites completely), building information literacy may come to be seen as the only sustainable way of combatting misinformation online.

Moreover, developing information literacy can also be a competitive boost, ensuring that people are better able to navigate the digital world in general, and be more effective and productive in their work. Indeed, faced with the abundance of information available today, it could even become a key part of education from a young age, in parallel with efforts to broader younger people's horizons and openness to the world. This could imply a place for libraries – school, university, public and beyond.

Some contributors argued that libraries could potentially have a role in wider policy discussions about information literacy, drawing on both their skills and reputation as places for seeking quality information. In this, they could even work with social media companies to deliver training and support to fight deliberate misinformation.

19 'OPEN' CHALLENGES LIBRARIES' USP

With a growing share of scientific information available freely, libraries are forced to adapt their role or lose their unique selling point (USP) and relevance

The Open Access (OA) movement has had significant success in challenging the assumption that the publication and dissemination of research can only take place through an economic model that sees users (or libraries on their behalf) obliged to pay publishers for access. Side-stepping the challenges created by restrictive copyright laws, open access publications are immediately or rapidly available for use by anyone with access to the internet.

OA has, in recent years, been joined by other open movements – open science and wider open scholarship, open educational resources, and Open GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) – all of which aim to reduce barriers to access to, use of, and engagement in education, science, and cultural life.

Some contributors worried, however, that the rise of open could lead to a sense that there was no longer a need for institutions to play the traditional role of libraries in providing an opportunity for people to access works that would otherwise be inaccessible. Without the need for libraries to spend money on subscriptions, there may be a risk that those taking funding decisions may choose to cut budgets.

In response, it was noted that at a fundamental level, greater access to information should be recognised as a good thing in itself. In parallel, others highlighted the scope for libraries themselves to develop new roles in order to add value, not least through supporting discoverability, ensuring preservation, and providing the skills and support needed to navigate around the vast number of available resources. Librarians could also play a key part in helping to manage research data repositories, which was essential for the realisation of the potential of open science.

Finally, as some contributors noted, the battle is far from won on open access. In addition to ongoing questions about how to ensure the financial sustainability and scalability of open models while also maximising their inclusiveness, there remain many researchers and authors who still doubt the merits of open. This may be out of a perception that there may be money to be made (rarely the case), or a sense that being available for free devalues their work. Libraries may need to direct some of their advocacy around the merits of maximum access to information towards authors themselves, to show them how powerful this can be as a force for the good.

20 INEQUALITIES DEEPEN

With technology creating new possibilities for those with access to it, the gap between them and those without grows, risking confining large shares of the population to poverty unless action is taken

A theme that has emerged across many of the other trends highlighted in this report is the risk that where new possibilities are not open to all, then they can end up widening divisions and inequalities.

Contributors pointed out that during the pandemic, those without access to the internet and the skills to use it have faced far more disruption to their education, and working and social lives than those who were able simply to move their lives online. The same goes for access to literacy and digital skills, which can be a gateway not only to jobs and other opportunities, but also simply to the possibility to learn more.

This is particularly important given that it can often be those who already face exclusion – people experiencing poverty or disability, as well as women and refugees – who are often also less likely to be connected.

Deepened inequalities can represent a challenge to social cohesion, and even the social contract on which societies and services such as libraries are built. Where they translate into reduced access to health, education, and other forms of participation, they also represent an attack on fundamental rights.

One suggested response to this was the need to continue to insist on libraries themselves being free to access, given the risk that charging could end up excluding some of those who need libraries most. Others would suggest that any pricing structure needs to ensure that it does not create a barrier, or stigma, for users.

Yet inequalities can also exist between libraries, as highlighted in Trend 10. It is possible that smaller libraries or those operating on smaller budgets (for example, those in poorer areas where less tax revenue is available to support them) are simply not able to offer the full range of services which could help users make optimal use of information to improve their lives.

Contributors' suggestions in response included a stronger focus on ensuring that there was at least a basic level of service across libraries, in order to ensure that library users, wherever they are, could benefit from core possibilities to access and use information.

Working with the Trends

The President-elect's session at the 2021 World Library and Information Congress drew on these identified trends to carry out a foresight exercise with participants. The goal of the session was to encourage reflection about the trends that were most likely to be significant for the future of libraries, drawing on the collective ideas of those participating.

▶ **View the President's session from WLIC 2021 on our Youtube channel**

The session drew loosely on the 'Delphi' model of identifying trends in a collaborative fashion, within the limits imposed by time (one hour) and the digital format of the session. It drew on online polling software to carry out this process live.

With the support of four experts chosen by the then President-elect, Barbara Lison, for the influence that they had had on her own thinking over time, the session used the below structure, which can of course be replicated within associations or other groups of libraries, either directly or in an adapted form.

The steps followed in the session are outlined on the right.

OUR METHOD

1) After an introduction, the set of 20 trends are presented to the audience. It may be helpful to share the trends in advance in order to allow the audience to become familiar with them.

2) The expert panel offers their own ideas on the trends, highlighting those that they think are particularly important.

3) The audience votes, selecting 10 of the 20 trends that they think are most significant for the future of the library field

4) The 10 trends which have received the most votes overall are revealed

5) The expert panel offers their reaction to the results, as well as their ideas on the most important of the remaining trends

6) The audience votes again, selecting 5 of the 10 remaining trends that they think are most significant for the future of the field

7) The 5 trends which have received the most votes overall are revealed

8) The expert panel offers their reactions

TRY IT YOURSELF!

With more time, or a different format, anyone interested in carrying out a similar exercise could explore some of the following options.

- Encourage group discussions at each stage, allowing all participants to identify the trends they think are most important, explaining why they think this is. These could be in person (where possible) or using break-out rooms on a digital platform. Participants should try to convince each other of their arguments, suggesting evidence for their thoughts.

- Add in a phase where experts and participants explore how the different chosen trends interact with each other – are they likely to complement each other or cancel each other out?

- Add in a phase where you try to define 'futures' – an image of what the library field could look like when different combinations of trends come to pass.

- Add in a phase where the experts and/or groups discuss differences between your results and those at the President-elect's session at WLIC:

The top 10 trends were:

1. Tough times ahead
2. Virtual is here to stay
3. The Comeback of physical spaces
5. Diversity gets taken seriously
6. An environmental reckoning)
8. The impatient user
11. Data domination
14. Lifelong learners
18. Information literacy recognised
20. Inequalities deepen

The top 5 trends were:

2. Virtual is here to stay
5. Diversity gets taken seriously
6. An environmental reckoning
14. Lifelong learners
20. Inequalities deepen

We also encourage you to explore other ways of working with the Trends to encourage reflection about the future!

Don't forget to keep us updated using the #IFLATrendReport hashtag.

Find out more about the Trends

In addition to the President-elect's session at WLIC, there were also three sessions where some of the emerging leaders presented their ideas for the future in more depth.
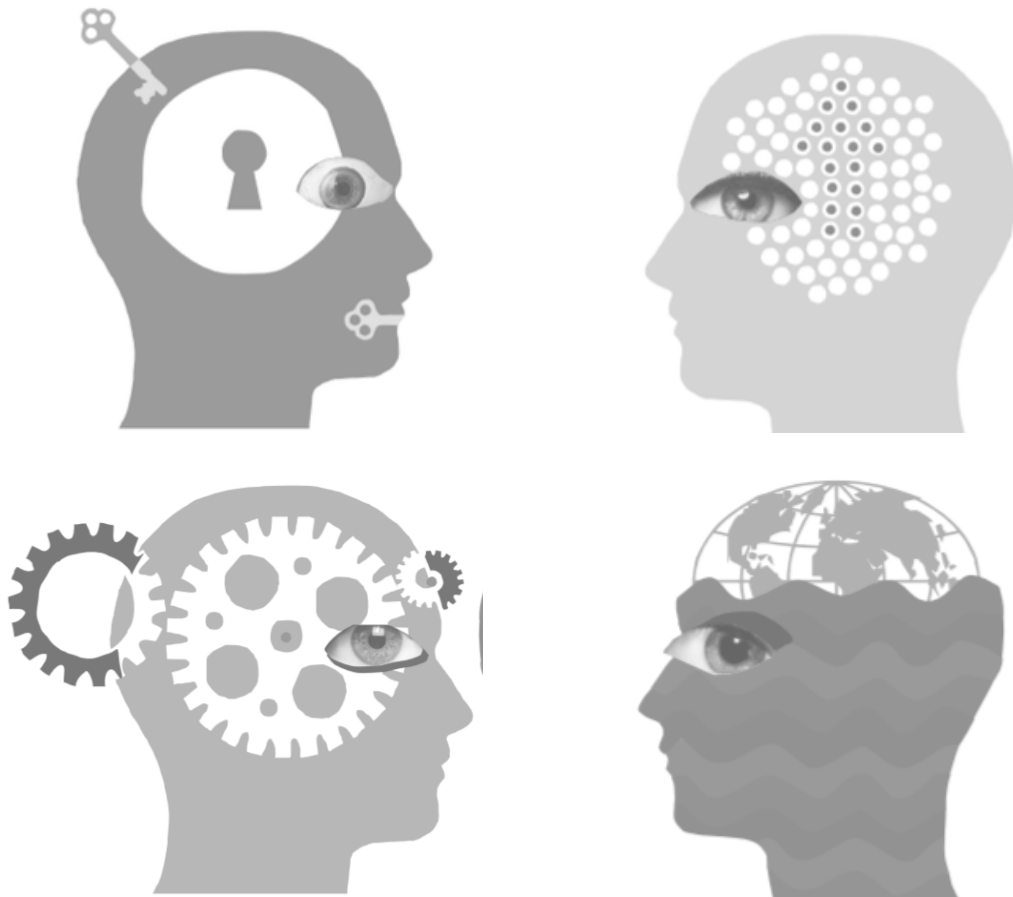
Organised by region (Asia-Oceania, Africa and Asia, and the Americas), these each featured 7-9 speakers.

You can watch these videos on IFLA's YouTube channel at the following links:

Africa and Europe: youtu.be/4tWHGR6zcKc
Asia-Oceania: youtu.be/s2iHbua_oCk
Americas: youtu.be/uKQS2zreQG0

TREND
REPORT