

# Towards a New Generation of Library Services

Barbro Wigell-Ryynänen

Counsellor for Library Affairs,  
Ministry of Education and  
Culture, Finland

In the Prime Minister's Finland in the Networks-campaign a year ago public libraries were brought out as gateways to a wide range of web-services, from library and eGovernment services to help with buying flight tickets on the web. The library network offers free use of the Internet throughout the whole country, and libraries have the advantage of a skilled staff, used to gathering information from the net and to guiding library users. There are no other institutions where citizens need for knowledge and information society skills are met in such a versatile way. Broadening out the services was a means of branding libraries as web-service specialists. During the campaign there were library nuggets and facts in between television commercials all evenings - librarians were presented as web-use professionals, libraries as conveyors of all kinds of useful information and knowledge.

Libraries were by no means turned into part-time travel agencies or branch offices of the banks, they helped people to learn how to do it themselves, and were recognized as well-functioning centres for e-citizenship. The everlasting image of the book-library-only was definitely diversified. The open attitude of library staff was rewarded with new terminals and a comprehensive in-service training program, paid for with campaign money.

Public libraries in rural areas work in close cooperation with the local educational and cultural authorities, in one hundred out of four hundred municipalities the library director is also responsible for local cultural provision. There is close cooperation with schools and other educational institutions, groups of day-care children visit the library regularly, and there are special services for elderly people. Librarians working in smaller libraries have to be open-minded, ready for new partnerships and cross-sector cooperation. At the same time even the smallest of rural libraries are expected to offer specialised library expertise. New technology makes possible new lifestyles; distance learning, teleworking from the

rural summer house, gathering versatile information about new livelihoods like organic farming. Library users expect to get full service in any library, whatever its size and location.

Smaller libraries lack the resources and skills to produce other than local material on the web. As 90% of libraries belong to some regional network, they mostly cooperate, of course, in developing regional virtual services, but the level of services vary very much in different regions.

The Ministry of Education buys contents and services produced by the National Library and FinElib, and by the Central Library for Public Libraries and the web-services for public libraries, libraries.fi. As Päivi Jokitalo will tell you about FinElib's services and the Nelli-portal I won't go into that other than just a little into the money part.

From the beginning FinElib was developed and financed to serve researchers and university libraries and their users. Public libraries are administered by the Department for Cultural Policy at the Ministry of Education and Culture, and that is why we have to buy our share of the services and pay for specialist to serve the public libraries, for Nelli-licenses and licenses for material in electronical format, for the right to use the university library catalogues and the right to do copy cataloguing from Fennica and other databases maintained by the National Library. About 695.000 euro is allocated annually to cover the National Library and FinElib services. It may seem to be quite a lot, but the Ministry consists of two departments with two Ministers, one for education and research and one for cultural affairs, and there are two separate budgets. We have a very thin state administration and as a rule comparatively small resources when it comes to library staff - we therefore have to be project oriented. The national portal and the licenses for material in electronical format ensure more equal access to sources of information and knowledge, regardless of local and regional economical resources.

The Central Library for Public Libraries, Helsinki City Library, is allocated annual grants for developing services on a national level, for introducing new methods and tools, and for housing libraries.fi. Libraries.fi is 100 % financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture with annual project grants. This year a total sum of 650.000 euro was allocated to the Central Library for the libraries.fi-services with its staff of four librarians, for developing the trilingual Search-Find-Locate-portal, S\*F\*L, and the Nelli-connections, for developing nationwide, web.2-based web-services for children and young people, for the web-music project and finally for developing a semantic guide for the Ask-a-librarian services.

Web 2.0 is emerging, and there are already librarians busy with producing Wikipedia material, writing blogs and pondering should the library catalogues be included in the MySpace library.

Using the Citizens' Gateway to Information and Knowledge, the S\*F\*L, the impatient user can switch to Google any time, to speed up the search. On the other hand, using the library search, there is more, and deeper information to be obtained.

Slowly and deep skills are words pronounced today with high regard, like they were never heard of before, by people occupied with marketing and branding. Why is that? Because the market is crowded with people who know a little something about everything, not being specialised in anything. A nice word for this would be renaissance thinking, but specialists with deep skills are desperately needed among all these smart generalists.

Implementing knowledge is a process, a slow process, actually. We learn new things by gradually adapting new knowledge to what we already know, something renewed coming out of it, if all goes well. Speaking of slow food, so much healthier than fast food, maybe we should start talking about slow knowledge, too? Slow knowledge, like slow food, is nourishing, not just filling up with useless, even harmful stuff.

Libraries are part of everyday life, fundamental changes in lifestyle and attitudes are impossible - or at least very unwise- to ignore. Internet opened up totally new service possibilities for libraries in the nineties, now is time to take the next tiger jump, to open up to new thinking, more than anything else.

Library systems providers in Finland already advertise renewed, web 2-based library systems, but aside the ready-made solutions there are interesting projects and pilots carried out.

The libraries.fi-staff is busily planning web 2- and semantic web-solutions, and taking part in FinnONTO, a huge, national cooperation project on ontologies for the semantic web - best known pilot version is the museums portal from 2004.

One of the important things for libraries today, according to the views of the libraries.fi staff, is to be visible on the web, to bring forth libraries' services in

the social networks, in places like Wikipedia, Del.icio.us, Library Thing, Habbohotel, IrcGalleria and blogs. There is no need to do everything on the own server any more, the idea is to take part in the activities of others and to open up library web services for a more social use. The web-2 pilot of libraries.fi is planned to be based on a nationwide fiction portal.

Hämeenlinna is a very nice little city with 50.000 inhabitants, situated about one hundred kilometers from Helsinki and surrounded by lakes. The web sites of the city library are quite advanced. This year Hämeenlinna City Library applied for state grants to carry out what they call the Library-Wiki-, or Häme-Wiki-project in cooperation with a library systems supplier. The first step is to integrate already existing services in a web 2-version supporting the local library community, with possibilities for users to participate actively in many ways. The sites will of course be open for all, especially the renewed version of the already very popular and widely visited subject guide, the Titbits collection of interesting links. The second step will be to integrate the Library-Wiki with nationwide web-services.

The library staff describes the creating of Library-Wiki as a continuously reassessed and transparent process in which the users take a very active part. One of the challenges is, accordingly, to succeed in activating the users. Users are meant to take part in creating all the planned sections, but there is also the users' own space, open to cultivation in accordance with personal profiles.

Here people can for instance create their own lists of favourites and get in touch with like-minded, or add personal search words and comments. It will be possible to subscribe to news lists and chats.

Also local artists have shown an interest to take part in the collective creating of the sites, for instance young musicians are interested in developing a new, virtual forum.

The first Häme-Wiki-version will be ready for testing in the beginning of 2008.

A further adjustment of the role of library professionals remains to be done. Librarians have long since discovered that part of the users, especially the young ones, know a lot more about computer technology and a wide range of net contents than the average librarian. Recognizing this, they have perhaps felt slightly diminished in their role as professionals. With the emerging of Wiki-libraries users are invited to take part in the core of library work, in information management and in producing library material working side by side with the professionals. The demand for a new approach is not necessarily easy, specific library skills and professional know-how has to undergo a thoroughly new assessment, skills and values have to be defined anew.

Library 2.0 is more about new thinking than about new technology.