IFLA Internet Manifesto 2024
Building a better Internet with libraries

The internet touches on all social, financial, cultural, political and economic aspects of modern life and along with artificial intelligence . iIt has been one of the most significant post-industrial revolution developments, the pace of which continue to truly transformed societies. As many institutions and structures have adapted to the new digital landscape, libraries have likewise changed the way they serve the information needs of their users.

In 2002, with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), IFLA launched its first Internet Manifesto. This document proclaimed the fundamental rights of users when accessing information via the Internet, and stressed the importance of unhindered access for the support of communities to attain freedom, prosperity and development. Four years later in 2006, a guidelines document was published in collaboration with UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) that intended to offer guidance to library and information professionals, policymakers and other stakeholders when drawing up policies concerning public access to the Internet and information. Finally, in 2014, a second manifesto was published, outlining similar principles as well as the role and responsibilities of library and information services regarding the Internet.

A decade has gone by, and while the world and our lives have become increasingly digital, IFLA's commitment remains. With a network that extends to over 2.8 million libraries globally, libraries have effectively adapted to new technological developments and have become anchor community institutions that facilitate access to information via the Internet and provide digital skills and resources to thousands of people around the world. Beyond providing Internet access, libraries make a substantial contribution to meaningful connectivity by providing access to culturally and lingually relevant materials and training for global communities, including the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Because of this, they have come to be instrumental actors in the realisation of human rights in the digital ecosystem, and consequently in everyday life.

As we move forward in this new age of digital interdependence and artificial intelligence, the pivotal role of library information professionals extends beyond the realms of traditional information dissemination. Today, libraries serve as dynamic agents not only in realizing the potential of the Internet but also in actively shaping its governance. Leveraging their expertise and resources is crucial for the development of effective policies that safeguard information access, promote digital inclusion, civic engagement, and that empower communities as a whole.

Our vision for the world

We want a more people-centered Internet. We believe it is possible to attain principles of meaningful and universal connectivity in a way that helps protect rights and realize potential.

We believe in a digitally inclusive version of the Internet and artificial intelligence that connects societies and that advances the rights and the digital autonomy of individuals so that they can participate fully and freely in society.

Our vision for libraries

Libraries are an essential part of the infrastructure for digital inclusion, from the policy planning to the delivery stage. Libraries, in all their forms, are inherently democratic spaces that can enhance access to information for all, including the digitally disadvantaged. They must continue to be enabling partners in building connected societies that are sustainable, accountable and person-centered.

I.   Introduction

As we stand at a key evolution moment for Internet Governance processes, libraries continue to be vital stakeholders that are positioned to champion principles for the achievement of a more people-centered Internet.

While moving towards processes such as WSIS and the Sustainable Development agenda, libraries engagement in the digital landscape remains imperative for the construction of a more inclusive information society.

In view of the above, this manifesto presents a series of principles setting out the different roles that libraries play in shaping these processes. These principles are drawn from libraries' existing services and initiatives and are meant to serve as a reference point for both library and information professionals and for Internet stakeholders and decision-makers in the pathway towards building a more inclusive digital future.

II.   Access to information and the Internet

Internet access is not merely a convenience, it is an enabler of freedom, empowerment and development in the digital age. The digital divide, characterized by disparities in access to digital resources and opportunities, poses significant challenges to the realization of universal human rights and sustainable development. In this regard, libraries have and will continue to ensure equitable access for all people, and in particular for the most vulnerable communities and individuals.

2.1 The provision of unhindered access to the Internet and globally available models of artificial intelligence (LLM's, large language models) contributes to the right to freedom of access to information and freedom of expression for people around the world. It supports communities and individuals in attaining freedom, prosperity and development.

2.2 Access to the Internet and all its resources should be consistent with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly Article 19, which states that *"everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression"*. Libraries support the idea of Internet access as a fundamental human right and as enabler not only of access to information but also of a range of many other rights via the acquisition of knowledge.

2.3 Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression, regardless of format and frontiers, is a central responsibility of the library and information profession.

2.4 Libraries help uphold these fundamental freedoms through provision of meaningful access to the internet.

2.5 Governments should strive to remove barriers to the flow of information, especially those that prevent individuals from taking advantage of opportunities that may improve their quality of life. An open Internet is essential and access to information and freedom of expression should neither be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship.

III.   Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms

While the Internet offers unprecedented opportunities for individuals, it also poses significant risks that may threaten the free exercise of our human rights. Because of this, libraries continue to play a central role in safeguarding human rights in the digital space while acting as trusted intermediaries between users and information sources. Their commitment to intellectual freedom extends effectively to the digital realm.
Libraries are vital partners this process by providing expertise, resources and advocacy to support stakeholder and governments' efforts in creating a more just and rights-respecting digital environment.

3.1 While mass-population scale connectivity offers the potential for democratization and freedom of expression, it also confers a significant risk to human rights from the surrender of civil liberties to vested interests.

3.2 The propagation of mis- and disinformation propagated by state and other actors presents a complex issue that must be combatted by a multistakeholder approach, combining platform regulation with awareness-raising and media and information literacy training.

3.3 Libraries will continue to protect intellectual freedom as part of their commitment to a society in which everyone can contribute, participate in and benefit from the intellectual, creative and cultural life of their community.

3.4 Decisions by government and other actors should be preceded by a rights impact assessment, and there should be a developed mechanism for periodic verification of the use of the Internet in support of human rights.

IV.   Digital inclusion and digital skills development for bridging the digital divide

Digital divides reflect directly on the development of our societies. In order to avoid this, it is important to uphold the value of digital inclusion and therefore recognize the importance of providing access to all, including marginalized and underserved populations. Libraries today and in the future fill this function by serving as points of access and by embracing inclusive principles that ensure that individuals with disabilities, varying levels of skill, in remote communities and with diverse cultural backgrounds can fully participate in the digital space.

4.1 As access to the inter~~est~~net and increasingly, artificial intelligence models for information provision is essential for addressing social disparities. Additional efforts by government and non-governmental actors shall be made to provide access to marginalized and underserved communities, thereby fostering greater social cohesion and empowerment.

4.2 Libraries offer educational resources and programs that enhance digital literacy, equipping users with the knowledge and skills to navigate the Internet safely, critically evaluate online information, and engage in responsible online behavior.

4.3 Inclusive design principles will increasingly be applied to library spaces and digital interfaces, ensuring that individuals with disabilities, differing orientations, varied cultures and differing levels of skill and resources can fully and effectively participate in online activities and access digital resources.

4.4 As library and information professionals, we encourage a vision of the Internet that is based on decolonial principles and that is respectful of indigenous and diverse knowledge systems as the only pathway towards a truly people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society.

V.   Meaningful connectivity

Meaningful connectivity encompasses open access to digital infrastructure, including bandwidth, ~~and~~ data and artificial intelligence models, as well as the ability to participate fully in digital communities and access critical media and information literacies. It is about individuals being able to enjoy the diversity of the digital experience and the opportunities it affords for learning and empowerment. It relies on the following pillars: universal access, affordability, usability and meaningful quality.
libraries can be instrumental in measuring meaningful connectivity. Libraries are instrumental in advancing the global meaningful connectivity agenda by providing inclusive spaces for digital participation, offering digital literacy opportunities and many other services. They are useful allies in supporting the measuring agenda by helping governments, organizations and other stakeholders in assessing the quality and impact of connectivity beyond traditional metrics.

9.1 Connectivity should be understood not just as a matter of bandwidth or Internet access, but as a richer context which combines: free and open access to digital infrastructure (including bandwidth, data, artificial intelligence and increasingly mobile data), the ability to participate freely in the digital lives of their communities and access to the critical media and information, digital and ai literacies needed to participate fully and freely in a connected society.

9.3 Governments and other stakeholders should support libraries and their potential to expand meaningful, human-centered approaches to connectivity in national broadband planning processes. They should be considered as key institutions to include within targets of connectivity and as priority opportunities for investment.

VI.   Access to online content

Access to content must be meaningful and extend beyond connectivity, it should encompass the ability for individuals to discover, engage with and contribute to a rich variety of digital resources. Libraries have and continue to be instrumental in enabling access to online content by digitizing cultural and linguistic materials, curating digital collections and providing platforms for user development.

8.1 All types of libraries have a key role in expanding meaningful access to online content by creating digital content through the digitization of physical collections, as well as providing spaces and support for users to express themselves. Libraries support the sharing through their own networks, as well as the creation and management of repositories and interfaces. These are particularly important in the research spaces as well as for content under copyright.

8.2 Government should make continued investment in the supporting of the creation of new content through targeted measures to support creators, as well as to take care to resist the emergence of standardization of cultural hegemonies. This includes measures to ensure that platforms behave in ways that give a fair chance for diverse content to be discovered.

8.3 Libraries encourage the full adaptation of copyright laws to the digital age. The mismatch between national provisions on exceptions and limitations, which are essential for libraries to do their jobs, must be addressed urgently to remove unnecessary blockages, uncertainty and fear from the work of libraries in supporting cross-border access to information. Similarly, libraries must be protected from unfair contract terms, able to disapply these – and circumvent digital locks – that prevent them and their users from enjoying copyright exceptions. Otherwise, the rise of digital risks representing a deregulation by stealth of knowledge markets, and a significant loss of usage rights.

8.4 Libraries will continue to support sound frameworks guaranteeing '*net neutrality*'. Meaning that the Internet users' freedom of choice should not be restricted or affected giving preferential treatment to certain content, services, applications or devices. This is a prerequisite for universal and non-discriminatory access to online content.

VII.　Digital trust, safety, security & data privacy

As stewards of information, libraries prioritize the well-being of all users, particularly of children and vulnerable individuals by implementing robust measures of protection against the exposure to harmful content and online threats. The library space will continue to be a trusted environment for information discovery and knowledge. Libraries also uphold the principles of data privacy by advocating for the responsible collection, use and retention of personal information given their extensive experience in information and data preservation.

5.1 Libraries will continue to prioritize the safety of all users while accessing the Internet within library premises. Adequate measures shall be implemented to protect users, particularly children and vulnerable individuals, from exposure to harmful content and potential online threats.

5.2 Libraries have a role in providing a trusted environment for information discovery. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies embedded in many of the systems used in society raises the stakes in the importance of discerning between trustworthy and false information and bias within information. The role of the library as a trusted institution to provide access will increase with the growing difficulty in discriminating between information sources.

5.3 Collaborative efforts shall be encouraged among libraries, relevant organizations and stakeholders to develop best practices, guidelines and tools for Internet safety that are tailored to the diverse needs of library users and that identify bias and more objective models for global populations with regards to artificial intelligence models.

5.4 Individual information that is gathered from the Internet activity of individuals must not be kept indefinitely and noy beyond the lifetime of the individual engagement of the person with an Internet service.

5.5 Libraries support the right to review of individuals. They should be provided a means to review and correct personal information that has been gathered.

5.6 Due to their experience in dealing with information and data preservation, government actors should view library professionals as key partners in data governance processes. Internet stakeholders should rely on their longstanding expertise with data collection and preservation.

VIII.　Safeguarding the open nature of the Internet

Safeguarding the open nature of the Internet amidst the growing threat of Internet Fragmentation is also a library concern as an open Internet is not only essential for facilitating access to information and freedom of expression but also for fostering global collaboration, innovation and socio-economic development. The emergence of fragmentation driven in part by commercial interests, often seeks to enclose digital spaces for profit. Libraries, as advocates for knowledge access, recognize the value of a borderless Internet and can help with the prioritization of public access, digital rights, non-discriminatory access to information and more.

6.1 An open Internet is essential for access to information and freedom of expression. Libraries support the need to reaffirm the value of a borderless Internet in order to maximize access to knowledge and advocate for open source or at least open artificial intelligence models that will also serve larger global populations.

6.2 As institutions with a commitment to providing the widest possible access to knowledge, libraries support full exchange of knowledge across borders. And raise attention to the issue of applying national rules globally as this

implies that smaller countries and low-income economies will face rules set by others that may not be applicable in their context and that could potentially endanger the open nature of the Internet.

6.3 Governments should work with libraries to prioritize policies, partnerships and investments at home and abroad that support and defend the open Internet, both through regulatory and standard bodies.

IX.   Digital public infrastructure & digital public goods

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) comprises essential digital systems and services owned, operated or regulated by the public sector, that facilitate societal functions and economic activities, such as broadband networks, data centers and others. This comes hand in hand with the concept of Digital Public Goods (DGPs) that can be defined as open-source software, open data, open standards and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable international and domestic laws and best practices. In view of this, libraries' role comes to play as in many counties, they are by default, contributors to ensuring the effectiveness of DPGs in improving service delivery, for instance by making openly license research and open access repositories available. Investment in implementing DPGs as the basis for public services should take account of the vital role of libraries in enabling engagement with such services.

7.1 Governments at all levels should see libraries as enablers of the overall global digital public infrastructure. Governments and other stakeholders should draw from their expertise for ensuring that the Internet works in ways that support development and not just private interests and that artificial intelligence infrastructures on the internet are also opened for their larger populations.

7.2 All stakeholders should encourage public support for the open source software and tools that enable the functioning of open access repositories and libraries in general and freely available open source artificial intelligence models available for all. Libraries will continue to offer openly licensed resources, to make them accessible and easy to use.

7.3 Libraries themselves must be recognized as a central pillar of any wider effort to deliver on open content or a knowledge commons as a digital public good. They should be enabled to fill their role as community-based actors that can integrate intermediaries into local digital ecosystems and facilitate greater scale services for inclusion.

X.   Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies

AI and emerging technologies encompass a diverse range of innovations, from machine learning and robotics to virtual reality and blockchain, each presenting unique opportunities and challenges for global communities. Libraries can serve to advance the understanding, adoption and ethical use of AI and emerging technologies by providing access to resources, facilitating learning opportunities, knowledge exchange and fostering critical dialogue.

10.1 Libraries stress the importance of having transparency, elimination of bias and accountability at the core of the development of AI and other emerging technologies. There should be combined international regulatory frameworks for the governance of AI and the data that is used to train these models should come from trustworthy sources containing objective information and datasets. This should be an ethics-based approach.

10.2 Libraries will continue to support ethical AI research and development by their procurement choices: purchasing AI technologies which abide by ethical standards of privacy and inclusivity.

The way forward

For governments and policy makers:

- We urge governments to invest in libraries as a cornerstone of digital public infrastructure for the protection of public interests. Only an informed society can deliver on the SDGs, meaningful access to information, and the means to apply it which will have a transversal impact on the development agenda.
- Governments should consult with library sector in development and delivery of national digital strategies, leveraging their expertise and community connections to inform policy development, implementation and evaluation
- We urge governments to consider the limitations of a tech-first approach and the advantages of investing in the creation of policies that support a version of the Internet for the public good.
- To support open science and open access to knowledge that aligns with transparent and accountable policymaking

For other Internet stakeholders:

- Partnering with libraries on issues related to the global digital agenda. Libraries can serve as trusted intermediaries and community hubs making them valuable allies in this process and test beds for new artificial language models for objective human feedback before release.
- Collaborate with libraries to promote digital literacy, civic engagement and human rights

For the private sector:

- Funding libraries and/or library projects with a digital and artificial intelligence focus. This may provide strategic advantages in the digital landscape and tap into a trusted network of community hubs and intermediaries
- Work together for the development of resources, products and services that support the global digital agenda and meet the information needs of diverse user groups

For libraries:

- Focus their capacities and investment on the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on impact of libraries on digital divide, connectivity, digital inclusion, and many other areas that can provide valuable insights into the digital needs and challenges of their communities.
- Spread awareness of digital connectivity goals and challenges at local, national, international levels
- Sharing of good practices in and outside the library network. Supporting library professionals in being involved, continued capacity development and promote knowledge exchange with other Internet stakeholders, organizations or institutions working in similar topics
- Engage in advocacy activities and reflect their views and contributions to their local digital ecosystems