



Unesco and Public Libraries

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DURING THE PAST five years, activities to encourage the development of public libraries as centers of popular education and culture have occupied a prominent place in Unesco's program. In this time a number of successful projects have been launched with substantial concrete results, and a constantly growing network of librarians associated in the work of Unesco has been established in many countries.

In carrying out activities in this field, Unesco has acted in close cooperation with governments, library associations, and individual librarians. With their help it has organized seminars and conferences to bring together librarians from all over the world or from a region, to examine their problems together and formulate plans of action which they could put into effect when they returned home. It has followed up on such meetings by publishing the papers produced and distributing them to librarians, educators, and government officials throughout the world, and by other means. It has set up a pilot project, in collaboration with national authorities, to provide a demonstration of first-rate public library service in a region previously without such service, awarded fellowships to librarians for study abroad, encouraged the organization of literacy campaigns and production of simply written material for newly literate people, and carried out many other activities which facilitate the spread of public library services.

These projects have been organized by Unesco, not as ends in themselves, but as stimulants to far wider action by governments, library associations, and individual librarians, on whom rests the ultimate responsibility for the development of public libraries. It is heartening to realize that these activities have resulted in the creation of new libraries and new services in existing libraries, and a general quickening of the public library movement in many countries.

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Nevertheless, in traveling from country to country one is struck with the great lack of public library services, and past achievements shrink when one realizes that most of the people in the world have never even seen a public library. Whole countries occupied by millions of people have not one public library worthy of the name, few trained librarians, no library schools, no library literature nor "tools" in the language of the country, no library associations, and few publications which the common people can read. Often a library situation like this is accompanied by staggering general problems, such as widespread illiteracy, poverty, and disease, which obviously have a considerable bearing on public library development. One has only to look at the countries where the public library movement has reached its most advanced state to realize that prerequisites for such development are a relatively high educational level, a high standard of living, and a healthful environment. It is true that a library can be started under difficult circumstances, but public library development for a whole country can proceed only at a rate approximating the rate of general improvement in the conditions under which the people live. These basic improvements are being made in many parts of the world, but progress must be measured in years, rather than in days and weeks, and for this reason world-wide activities to extend public library coverage can only be considered as a long-term effort.

Several important projects were undertaken by Unesco in the public library field. In 1947, as a first step in implementing its public library program, Unesco engaged Emerson Greenaway, then head of the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, as a consultant, to make a survey of public library services in Europe. Greenaway's report provided a valuable basis for work in that region, and on his recommendation, a Unesco public library charter was drafted to give librarians and the general public in all countries a clear picture of the guiding principles of public library service endorsed by Unesco. The charter was published as a leaflet and poster under the title, *The Public Library, a Living Force for Popular Education*.¹ Thousands of copies were distributed in English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Arabic to Unesco Member States throughout the world. Displayed in libraries and distributed to adult education groups and other organizations, the document has helped spread the modern concept of public library service and has provided support for progressive librarians, particularly in places where public libraries are not yet well advanced.

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Unesco has organized three public library meetings which have given librarians an opportunity to work out their problems together and to acquire new knowledge and enlarged points of view. Participation in such gatherings with colleagues from all over the world has brought courage and determination to many librarians, who realized for the first time that they were not alone with their difficulties but members of an international movement working on the same problems. Publication of the recommendations and papers of these meetings has provided these and other librarians with needed support in convincing local authorities that public library services are indeed essential.

In organizing these meetings, Unesco requests governments to send their leading librarians and those who are likely to be the leaders of tomorrow. The points are that the conferences and seminars are really useful only if they conduce to action, and the most effective and extended action can be taken by people whose positions give them some power and influence.

In 1948 Unesco, in collaboration with the International Federation of Library Associations and the government of the United Kingdom, organized the first international summer school for librarians in Manchester and London, England. Fifty librarians from nineteen countries took part in the meeting, which lasted four weeks. The American participants were: Wallace Van Jackson, formerly head of the United States Information Service Library in Monrovia, Liberia; Helen Wessells, now editor of the *Library Journal*; and Marietta Daniels, Associate Librarian, Columbus Memorial Library, Pan American Union. The work was guided by an international faculty consisting of a Norwegian, a Britisher, an Indian, a Belgian, and an American in the person of Leon Carnovsky, Professor of Library Science in the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago. The course included lectures by the faculty and guest speakers, discussions, and demonstrations. The "laboratory" for the school was the Manchester Public Library, which was an eye-opener for librarians from countries where public library services are little developed. Subjects discussed included the philosophy of public librarianship, book selection policies, the development of extension services, adult education group programs and reader's advisory services, relations with other educational institutions and special social groups, work with children and adolescents, the organization and administration of public libraries, technical processes, personnel, and finance.

The London session, which took place during the final week of the school, was timed to coincide with the meeting of the International Federation of Library Associations. It was thus possible for the school to secure a number of outstanding librarians as guest speakers. Among them was Carl Milam, then director of United Nations libraries. The following countries were represented at the school: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, India, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United States of America.

Unesco's second public libraries meeting, the Seminar on the Role of Libraries in Adult Education, was held in the Stadsbibliotek of Malmö, Sweden, in 1950. This modern and attractive library was an excellent headquarters for the seminar. Indeed, the interiors of the Stadsbibliotek and its principal branch made a marked impression on the participants. Even those from countries where public libraries are most advanced collected photographs and specifications for future use in planning new buildings.

Participants in the seminar came from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Ceylon, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the U.S.A., and Venezuela. American participants were: Ralph Munn, Director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh; Fern Long, Supervisor, Adult Education Department, Cleveland Public Library; and Helen T. Steinbarger, Consultant in Adult Education, Public Library of the District of Columbia.

Preparation and collection of material for the meetings began months in advance. Thus, when the seminar opened, it was possible to provide participants with a number of working papers in English and French which had been prepared by experts in various countries, and with detailed discussion outlines drafted by the group leaders. Extensive documentation on library adult education work had been assembled for the seminar library, and an exhibition showing what libraries are doing throughout the world had been set up in the main meeting-room. Approximately fifty films, as well as film-strips, were also on hand for use during the meeting.

The director of the seminar was Cyril O. Houle, Dean of University College at the University of Chicago, who also led one of the groups. The other group leaders were Lachlan F. MacRae, Chief Librarian of Fort William Public Library, Canada, and Yvonne Odden, Librarian

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of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and formerly consultant in Unesco's Fundamental Project in Haiti. Most of the credit for the outstanding work accomplished at this seminar is due to the excellent leadership provided by this top-flight team of experts and the efficient collaboration of Ingeborg Heintze, Director of the Malmö Stadsbibliotek.

The work of the seminar was laid out according to three general topics, each assigned to a working group. Participants could choose the section they wished to join. Group I, under Houle, discussed the basic character of adult education in the library, and the planning, organizing, carrying out, publicizing, and evaluating of library adult education programs, especially in countries where library services are reasonably well developed. Group II, led by MacRae, concerned itself with audio-visual materials and techniques in library adult education, i.e., films, radio, television, recordings, discussion groups, and exhibitions. Group III's subject was the establishment of library service as an aid to adult and fundamental education in underdeveloped regions. Odden was the leader of this third group.

The seminar was run on democratic lines, with leadership spread among as many people as possible. In the middle of the first week, as soon as the participants began to know one another, they were asked to elect three members who would serve on a steering committee with the director and group leaders. This committee met regularly throughout the four weeks to decide on policies, appoint other committees, and handle various matters which came up for discussion. Every effort was made to ask all participants to serve on committees or to accept special assignments, such as acting as chairman of a plenary session. Thus responsibility for the work and success of the meeting was widely distributed, with the result that the spirit and teamwork of the seminar were excellent.

There was no air of the classroom in Malmö. Lectures were few and limited to the first three days. The groups began their meetings immediately after the opening ceremonies, and during the first week each participant had an opportunity to speak for ten minutes or so about himself and his work. After that, any changes desired by the groups were made in the provisional discussion outlines, and the participants began discussing some of the general points on the agenda. As soon as the shape of the various problems to be considered was clearly seen, the groups broke up into small committees for intensive study and exchange of ideas on specific topics.

An evaluation committee elected by the seminar sent a questionnaire to all participants nine months after the meeting to check on action taken as a result of the seminar. The report of this committee, of which Ralph Munn was chairman, has been widely distributed in mimeographed form.²

In response to a request made by the members of the Malmö Seminar, the government of Sweden and Unesco have collaborated in the production of a 16 mm. sound film on Swedish public libraries, called *The Road to Books*. Prints in English, French, and Spanish will soon be distributed to Unesco National Commissions, for showing to librarians and educators as well as to the general public in Member States.

In October 1951 Unesco held a conference on the development of public library services in Latin America, in the Biblioteca Pública Municipal of São Paulo, Brazil. The meeting was convened in collaboration with the Organization of American States and the Brazilian authorities to consider basic public library problems in Latin America, and to draft plans and recommendations for the development and extension of public library services in the region. Seventeen countries and four international organizations were represented at the meeting by 119 librarians, of whom 63 were observers from Brazil.

The twenty-one-story Biblioteca Pública Municipal in São Paulo was an excellent site for the conference. It provided good quarters and a good example of public library services in action. In addition, São Paulo has a children's library, a university library, and mobile services for workers, all first-rate and of interest to the librarians from other parts of Latin America.

The main work of the conference was carried out in four commissions, where the discussions were of a practical kind and directed toward action. The broad subjects considered were: development of public library services on a regional or national scale; inter-American action needed for public library development; library services for children in public and school libraries; and professional training for work in public libraries. The commissions' work was based on twenty-one working papers, most of which were distributed with a fifty-six page bibliography and other documents several weeks before the meeting. The four volumes in the series of Unesco Public Library Manuals were used as background documents.

The following definition and statement of public library objectives,

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which owe much to the American Library Association, were adopted by the conference:

“The Public Library, a product of modern democracy, and its foremost agent for the integral education of the people, is the institution which conserves and organizes human knowledge in order to place it at the service of the community without distinction of profession, creed, class or race. Its objectives shall be: (1) to offer the public information, books, diverse materials and facilities for the best service of their interests and intellectual requirements; (2) to stimulate freedom of expression and a constructive critical attitude toward the solution of social problems; (3) to educate man to participate in a creative manner in community life and to promote a better understanding between individuals, groups and nations; (4) to extend the activities of the centres of learning, offering new educational possibilities to the people. In order to fulfill its objectives the Public Library must enjoy absolute freedom in its task of diffusing culture, and ample autonomy to function.”³

The conference then pin-pointed and analyzed some of the top priority problems which must be solved if public libraries in Latin America are to carry out these objectives and become more effective agencies for the education of the masses. As a result of its deliberations, the meeting recommended the enactment of national library laws and provision of adequate financial support for public libraries, increased public library services for workers' education, establishment of national bibliographic centers, increased exchange of publications in the region, publication of more books and pamphlets especially suited to people who have recently learned to read, expanded and improved library services for children, translation and preparation of books on library science, and more library schools. The conference also made suggestions concerning the location of the public library pilot project and the bibliographical center to be organized by Unesco in Latin America.

The conference placed considerable stress on practical accomplishments as a result of the meeting, and appointed a committee to check with conference members, in the middle of 1952, on action taken. Other follow-up activities are being undertaken by the Library Specialist in Unesco's Havana office, who was appointed shortly after the São Paulo meeting.

This year the spotlight will turn on Africa, when Unesco holds a public library seminar in Ibadan, Nigeria, for the librarians of Africa. The preliminary arrangements for the meeting will be made before this article appears in print, when the writer and Yvonne Odden, Librarian of the Musée de l'Homme, who will direct the seminar, make a trip to Dakar, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Leopoldville, Brazzaville, and Algiers to do the spade work for the seminar.

A series of publications called the Unesco Public Library Manuals has resulted from the meetings described above. The first three volumes in the series were based on material produced at the 1948 school in England. The others contain a selection of the working papers and group reports of the other meetings. All of the volumes have been published in English, French, and Spanish, and some in Arabic and Italian as well. They are "best-sellers" among Unesco publications—one country alone has ordered 3,000 copies of each volume—and many of the editions have been reprinted. The following are the volumes which have already appeared: *Education for Librarianship*⁴ by J. Periam Danton; *Public Library Extension*⁵ by Lionel R. McColvin; *Adult Education Activities for Public Libraries*⁶ by Carl Thomsen, Edward Sydney, and Miriam D. Tompkins; *Libraries in Adult and Fundamental Education; the Report of the Malmö Seminar*,⁷ edited by Cyril O. Houle; and *Development of Public Libraries in Latin America*,⁸ the report on the São Paulo Conference, published in the autumn of 1952.

The *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries*, which is distributed to 8,000 institutions throughout the world, often prints material on public libraries. A recent article which proved very useful was "Public Library Service to Labour Groups," by Dorothy Bendix,⁹ Chairman of the American Library Association Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. The January 1951 issue of the *Unesco Bulletin of Fundamental Education* was entirely devoted to the subject of libraries in fundamental education.

One of Unesco's most successful activities is the Delhi Public Library, a pilot project organized by Unesco and the government of India. Opened by Nehru, the Prime Minister, in October 1951, the library now has over 10,000 registered borrowers. It lends 24,000 volumes and serves 67,000 people every month. Its fast-growing book collection already totals approximately 20,000 volumes, most of which are in Hindi and Urdu. Among the library's most popular features is an active

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program of lectures, discussions, story hours, and film showings for adults and children. Fifty of these meetings each month draw over 3,000 people.

Established to give special service to new literates, the library is setting up deposit stations in literacy centers and starting a program for production of easy-to-read books for people who have recently learned to read. It is also translating profusely illustrated children's books published in the United States and other countries. However, new editions of these books are not being published at this time. Instead, the Hindi or Urdu translation is printed on small strips and pasted over the original text in a copy of the foreign edition of each book. The translations are also made available to other Indian libraries. The project has had a large bookmobile constructed, and planned to begin mobile service to outlying parts of Delhi late in 1952.

The Delhi Public Library, as a pilot undertaking, is intended to stimulate similar developments elsewhere. The General Conference of Unesco is accordingly being asked to include in the 1953-54 program several internships, to enable librarians from neighboring countries to work at the project, for the purpose of gaining experience which would be useful to them in organizing public library service along similar lines in their countries. Proposed too is an evaluation of, and final report on, the project at the end of 1954, when Unesco's active association with the library is scheduled to cease. Such a report, which would sum up all of the findings of the enterprise applicable elsewhere, should be extremely useful to organizers of public library services in conditions similar to those found in Delhi. Also likely is a film on the library's activities, which will probably be made soon.

The library is financed jointly by Unesco and the government of India, the latter bearing the larger share of the expenditure. Unesco has agreed to contribute \$60,000 during the period 1951-1954, subject to approval of successive sessions of the General Conference, and the Indian government will provide \$120,000 during the same period, conditioned on the approval of its Parliament. It is anticipated that after 1954 the library will be financed entirely by the Indian authorities.

A project similar to the Delhi library will be organized next year in Latin America. Preliminary arrangements have already been made with the government of Colombia, where it will be situated.

Unesco has awarded twenty-one fellowships to librarians from fifteen countries for study abroad, and under its Technical Assistance program

has granted thirteen additional library fellowships. Some of the fellows have specialized in public library work and have made all or part of their study tours in the United States. The Exchange of Persons program has been particularly helpful in giving an impetus to library development in countries where young librarians have no opportunity to see first-rate library services.

Unesco has worked constantly to surmount or remove the barriers which hamper the free flow of books and other educational, scientific, and cultural materials from country to country. One of these has been circumvented by the Unesco Coupon Scheme, which since 1948 has enabled libraries and other institutions in "soft" currency countries to use their own currencies to buy books from "hard" currency countries.

The procedure used is now well known. Unesco prints the coupons and sells them to Unesco National Commissions in each participating country, usually for dollars, pounds sterling, or francs. The National Commissions, in turn, sell the coupons to libraries and other institutions for their national currency. Booksellers receiving coupons send them to Unesco for redemption in their own currency. An example may make this clearer. A librarian in, say, India may wish to order an American publication. He buys a Unesco coupon from his National Commission, paying for it in rupees. He sends the coupon, with the title and author of the book he wants, to the American Booksellers' Association, which forwards it to the appropriate publisher. The publisher sends the requested book to the Indian librarian and later forwards the coupon to Unesco for redemption in dollars.

Operation of the scheme is made possible by a "hard" currency reserve, provided by Unesco and supplemented by funds from the sale of coupons in "hard" currency countries. The American Library Association Council adopted a resolution at the 1952 midwinter meeting, urging American librarians to use Unesco coupons to pay foreign bookseller's bills in order to make additional dollar credits available for the purchase of American books by foreign institutions and readers. Thirty countries have participated in various sections of the scheme for books, films, or scientific materials, and approximately two million dollars worth of coupons have been issued.

Great progress was made in 1952 in removing several barriers hindering the free circulation of publications and certain other items, when the Unesco Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Materials went into effect. The agreement abolishes

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import duties on foreign books, and eases the restrictions in certain countries on purchase of foreign currency for payment abroad. So far eleven countries have ratified the covenant and nineteen others have signed it.

In 1951 Unesco launched the Unesco Gift Coupon Scheme in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Under this plan, Unesco prints and sends to clubs and other organizations in these donor countries booklets of gift stamps which the organizations sell to their members. Each stamp booklet sold pays for one Unesco Gift Coupon, which is a form of international check or money order used to purchase books, films, and equipment for needy public libraries and other institutions.

During the past two years Unesco has successfully begun a new kind of international aid—the reconstruction of library collections which were devastated during the war, by volunteer workers from foreign countries. In 1950 and 1951 groups of Danish and Swedish librarians and students literally saved the collections of the library of Valognes in France. In 1951 Unesco encouraged and helped a similar effort by the United Nations Student Association of Great Britain and the British Library Association, which have been able to give assistance to the Municipal Library at Dunkirk and to the National and University Library at Strasbourg. This work is now spreading. The enthusiasm of the first delegations has inspired the International Students' Movement of the United Nations to form groups of volunteer workers, and the British associations intend to continue their exertions.

A large part of Unesco's program is in the field of education, and many activities, such as literacy campaigns, production of publications for neo-literates, and seminars and training courses for educators, have a close relationship to the development of public libraries. For this reason, the Education Department and the Libraries Division work in close cooperation on projects which concern both. The Libraries Division has prepared working papers, set up exhibits, or sent representatives to many Unesco meetings on adult, fundamental, and workers' education. Also, plans are now being evolved for the establishment of rural library services in connection with the Fundamental Education Training and Production Center in Patzcuaro, Mexico, and training in public library techniques for educators at a similar center to be set up in Egypt is a likely future development.

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