

Report:

My time as a scholar at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) Documentation Centre and Library

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Background

During my years as a librarian in the municipality of Botkyrka, Sweden, I have become aware of challenges concerning multilingualism and adult literacy. Since my work concerns adult literacy and second language learning I have been looking for more knowledge in the field and other people's experiences in order to improve my work. I had met a lot of librarians with a lot of know-how, but I have also experienced a need for more knowledge in the field of adult literacy (especially in multilingual contexts) within the public library sector. Therefore, I and a few colleagues applied for a grant from the European Union fund Grundtvig 2013. The application was accepted, and in June 2014 the European workshop and conference *Literacy for all – Botkyrka 2014* was held in Hallunda, Botkyrka. About 20 European librarians participated in the week-long workshop, which resulted in the creation of the network *Literacy for all – European library network*. *Literacy for all* is a network on adult literacy and libraries in Europe. The mission is to create spaces for exchange of ideas and mutual encouragement among library workers, with the purpose to further develop library services that promote literacy among Europe's adult population. Today the network has a little more than thirty members from all over Europe. One of the invited guests was Lisa Krolak, Librarian and Head of Documentation Centre and Library at Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg. During the week she gave a lecture about adult literacy and the role of public libraries. She also presented the network ALADIN (Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network), which was established 1997 to support networking and capacity building between documentation centres and libraries in the area of adult learning and literacy.

After the workshop and conference the exchange continued within the *Literacy for all* network, and during winter 2014/2015 Lisa Krolak sent me an invitation to work as a scholar at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) during April 2015. The invitation was a great opportunity for me, and with hope to be able to realize it, I sent an application for funding to Bibliothek & Information Deutschland (BID), the Federal Association of German Library and Information Associations. I am deeply grateful for the approval of my application.



UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)

I spent the month of April 2015 at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg. My place of work was the Documentation Centre and Library. The Institute was established 1952 (then with the name UNESCO Institute for Education), and the Documentation Centre and Library dates back to 1953. They are located at Feldbrunnenstraße 58 in Hamburg in a beautiful house called Ballin Villa, named after Albert Ballin, a powerful shipping magnate who used to live there. The UNESCO Institute today has around 35 employees. The Documentation Centre and Library have three employees. On the homepage of the Institute you can read about the organization and it's fields of work:

“The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is a non-profit, policy-driven, international research, training, information, documentation and publishing centre of UNESCO. One of seven educational institutes of UNESCO, UIL promotes lifelong learning policy and practice with a focus on adult learning and education, especially literacy and non-formal education and alternative learning opportunities for marginalized and disadvantaged groups.”

The Institute has three programme areas: Lifelong Learning Policies and Strategies, Literacy and Basic Skills, and Adult Learning and Education. A certain priority is made on Africa and Gender. The Documentation Centre and Library serves staff in all three programme areas, and every library employee has responsibility for one of the areas. The work of the Institute in all programme areas includes advocacy, research, capacity-building, and networking on a global level.



Ballin Villa © Wolfgang Meinhart, Hamburg (Wikimedia Commons).

My month at UIL Documentation Centre and Library

The UIL Documentation Centre and Library has more than 56.000 items in their collection, and probably holds one of the most comprehensive collection in the area of the Institute's work: Lifelong learning, literacy, and adult education. The collection contain a rich linguistic diversity, especially when it comes to learning materials from adult literacy programmes from around the world. Approximately 60% of the collection is in English. There is an online catalogue giving access to bibliographic information. The Documentation Centre and Library is open to the general public and residents of Hamburg may borrow materials free of charge. The Documentation Centre and Library is involved in different ways in all the Institutes programmes, and there is also some digitization projects going on.

During my month in Hamburg I had two main obligations. One concerned the *Literacy for all* network. The UIL has a database called LitBase, in which they collect best practice examples from around the world concerning programs that aim to increase adult literacy. My work was to start to collect information within the library network, so that the work of libraries can get more attention in the database. The second obligation concerned the involvement of Lisa Krolak in IFLA (the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions). She is at the standing committee of the Literacy & Reading section. As part of that responsibility, Lisa Krolak had offered to make suggestions of a revision of the IFLA Standard *Guidelines for Library-Based Literacy Programs*. My other main obligation in Hamburg was to give input in her work to revise the document.

Besides that I visited the public library in Hamburg and took part in some of their activities. I also had meetings with people in Hamburg working in the field of literacy. At the end of the month I travelled in Germany and the Netherlands to meet some inspiring librarians in the field of adult literacy, among them two persons involved in the *Literacy for all* network. During the month I also held a presentation about my work as a librarian in Botkyrka to the staff of the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning.

LitBase

LitBase is a webpage and database administrated by UIL, with the aim to support Unesco's role as clearing house in adult literacy and numeracy. On the webpage it can be read:

"The exchange of experience and transfer of knowledge are crucial to the promotion of literacy and numeracy efforts. In order to encourage all key actors to share their experiences, pass on the lessons that they have learned and gain inspiration from innovative approaches in the field of literacy, this website provides a selection of effective adult literacy and numeracy programmes from across the regions. Further programme descriptions will be added on an ongoing basis."

The practice of collecting best practice examples in LitBase has four main objectives:

- "• facilitate access to pertinent information on adult literacy and numeracy programmes for all literacy stakeholders, including policy-makers, researchers and practitioners;*
- encourage synergies and cooperation through the sharing of experiences and lessons learned;*

- *identify current trends, challenges and information gaps in literacy in order to provide a global overview of the field; and*
- *promote adult literacy and education as a means of enhancing lifelong learning.”*

One of my duties during my month in Hamburg was to start collecting material to LitBase from members of the *Literacy for all* network. In order to do this in an effective manner I created a form with some basic questions about the work with adult literacy in the libraries of the network members. I distributed the form through email, and got answers from library workers in UK, Netherlands, Latvia, Czech Republic, Spain, and Sweden, to name a few. The texts based on these answers are not yet finished, but will be delivered to UIL and Lisa Krolak during late summer 2015. However, in the answers there was a wide variety of projects and services: from *IT taster sessions* (one-to-one instruction for complete beginner, for people who need to refresh their knowledge, or just want to know what the Internet is all about) to *Swedish with baby* (informal meeting space practicing Swedish together with other parents and their children).

Bücherhallen Hamburg (Dialog in Deutsch & Gedichte für Wichte)

During my month I was interested to get more insight about the work of the public libraries of Hamburg. I visited the Bücherhalle in Hamburg several times, both the central library close to the main railway station, and some small branches. For example, I visited the branch in Wilhelmsburg. Besides the informal visits I also met library workers responsible for the *Dialog in Deutsch* program. It is a very large and ambitious program that is taking place in all the public libraries in Hamburg on a regular basis. The program is executed by volunteers, and coordinated by library staff. The concept of the program is simple but brilliant: it is an informal meeting space and learning opportunity where you can speak German together with other people that have the wish to improve their language skills. The main target group are people that immigrated to Germany (for both humanitarian and work reasons). To participate is free of charge and it is open to all, and there is no registration. There are no tests or exams, just an opportunity to practice the language. In Swedish libraries there is a similar activity (in Sweden it is called Språkkafé – or Language café). During my visit I also participated in a *Dialog in Deutsch* event, which gave me an impression about the methodology used. When I participated the volunteer was a retired teacher, and her experience with language acquisition was obvious.

Besides visiting the public libraries in Hamburg I also visited the *Buchstart* office. Buchstart is a project for early childhood language development through literature. The aim is that all children in Hamburg should experience books, stories and rhymes as early as possible. Since 2007 a free Bookstart bag is given to every child in Hamburg when meeting a child doctor. The program is financed by Hamburg city and private donations. They have good collaboration with child doctors in the city, since the doctors realise the importance of books

when it comes to early language development. Besides the free book bag *Buchstart* also works with a program called *Gedichte für Wichte* [Poetry for little ones], a program for children up to three years old and their parents. The program consists of singing, playing finger games and watching picture books. It is a special method that is possible to do by yourself and your child, as well as in groups, together with other children and their parents. *Buchstart* collaborated with the public libraries in Hamburg, and many libraries have regular *Gedichte für Wichte* events. I took part and observed one of these events at the central Hamburg Bücherhalle.

Presentation of my work to staff at UIL

During my month in Hamburg I held a presentation called *Experiences of librarianship and adult learning from Botkyrka* about my own work to staff and interns at UIL. I gave a brief presentation about the part of Sweden where I work, i.e. Botkyrka municipality. It is a growing municipality in the Stockholm region, and has one of the most demographically diverse population in Sweden. Then I gave a short presentation about Bibliotek Botkyrka, the public library organization of Botkyrka municipality. Focus was put on Fittja bibliotek, the library where I worked at the time, and the activities I have worked with that concern adult learning and literacy. Example of activities I gave was Language Café, Reading group for seniors with no or limited experience of formal schooling, Performances & Public Discussions, and Family Saturdays.

Visiting Berlin, Münster & Breda

During my visit at UIL I was encouraged by Lisa Krolak to visit places outside Hamburg that could give me input on adult literacy and librarianship. It was also an opportunity to keep contact with persons from the Literacy for all network, and get knowledge about their work. I therefore decided to meet librarian Sarah Tscholl in Berlin, prison librarian Gerhard Peschers in Münster, and Librarian Lianne Knobel in the city of Breda in Netherlands.

In Berlin I met Sarah Tscholl at her work at Bibliothek am Luisenbad in Berlin-Mitte. The library is beautifully located in an old building, just beside a park area in Berlin-Mitte. The area is demographically diverse, and the library holds a large collection of for example Turkish literature, movies, and magazines, besides the collection in German. Sarah works as a librarian, and has specific focus on digital services. Her duty within the organization is described with *Innovative Online-Dienste*. She told me about her work to develop collections in different languages, about recently started collaboration with local homes for refugees, and collaborations with schools. My impression about the organization was that it is one in transition: from highly collection focused to a more pedagogical, digital and meeting

oriented library. The library building in Luisenbad gave me a strong sense of potential, and hopefully the city of Berlin will continue to finance the library enough through these transitions.

The next stop was in Münster, a small town in Nordrhein-Westfalen. There I met librarian Gerhard Peschers, who works as a prison librarian at the city's prison. The library was awarded Germany's Library of the Year 2007, and when I met Gerhard I could get a feeling why. He was a most dedicated person when it came to the right to read for the imprisoned. The library is small, but full of concern for details. The library is widely used by the prisoners. He told me that the situation for prison libraries in Germany is difficult, generally speaking, and that he does what he can for the development and maintenance of prison libraries in Nordrhein-Westfalen. His dedication to prison libraries extends beyond Nordrhein-Westfalen and Germany, and he has been involved in a lot of international conferences and collaborations, in order to put focus on issues of education and reading for prisoners worldwide.

The last stop before I went back to Hamburg was in Breda in the Netherlands. There I met Lianne Knobel, library developer at Bibliotheek Breda. She works in a program called *Taal & Werk* (language and work), a program for immigrants, unemployed and people with low literacy skills. When I arrived at the library I was invited to take part in a Dutch class, which was a part of the program. It differed from *Dialog in Deutsch* and *Language café* in that it required registration in advance. It was therefore more formal in nature. Like *Dialog in Deutsch* in Hamburg it was led by volunteers. Besides regular classes in the Dutch language there were other aspects of *Taal & Werk*, for example IT courses and job seeking coaching. During my visit in Breda I was happy to hear that Lianne Knobel just recently had been a part of the Standing committee of the Literacy & Reading section of IFLA. We talked a lot about that and our hope that the literacy and basic skill issues will take a large place in the work of IFLA in the near future. We also discussed the future of the *Literacy for all* network. One insight we shared was the need for the network to expand. Another common view we had was the need to create a second real life meeting. That would certainly strengthen the motivation to put energy and effort to work with the network.

IFLA (Literacy & Reading section)

The 81st IFLA General Conference and Assembly will be held in August 2015 in Cape Town, South Africa. Lisa Krolak is part of the standing committee of the Literacy & Reading section, and in Cape Town she will put forward a revision of the document *Guidelines for Library-Based Literacy Programs*. The Guidelines are a so called *IFLA Standard*. The work to produce and revise standards is a priority within IFLA, and on the webpage you can read the following about Standards:

“IFLA standards are internationally reviewed published and regularly updated documents. Each IFLA standard reflects current consensus on rules, principles, guidelines, best practice or models for a particular activity or service. IFLA standards in their diversity of styles and subject matter provide optimum benefit for the international library community. Standards are established by IFLA professional units who work in collaboration and by consensus.”

The *Guidelines for Library-Based Literacy Programs* is a document with practical suggestions. It concerns both programs initiated by libraries and how libraries can cooperate with different actors to create more literate societies. The document is in English, but is translated to French, Spanish, German, Russian, Arabic, and Portuguese. All versions of the document are possible to reach from the IFLA webpage.

I read the document closely in the light of my experiences as a librarian in a Swedish context, and then gave my comments and suggestions to Lisa Krolak. It was an interesting experience. At a first glance the document looked quite good as it was, and it was only a few details that attracted attention. After a while, however, bigger and bigger questions arose, even questions of principal character. Just to take one example: the concept *Literacy Programs* is ambivalent and risks to reduce the function of libraries on literacy to classroom type learning. Therefore libraries as *Literate Environments* (with literacy events in a broader sense) maybe should be a more interesting than *Literacy Programs* to discuss and conceptualize in guidelines? However, I gave comments of both principal character and on the detail level.

The screenshot shows the IFLA website interface. At the top left is the IFLA logo. A red navigation bar contains links for 'About IFLA', 'Activities and Groups', 'News and Events', 'Standards', 'Membership', 'Partners', 'Publications', and 'Annual Conference'. A breadcrumb trail reads: 'You are here: Home » Activities and Groups » Literacy and Reading » Publications » Guidelines for Library-Based Literacy Programs'. Below the navigation is a search bar. The main content area is titled 'Guidelines for Library-Based Literacy Programs' and offers language options: français | Español | Deutsch | Русский | العربية | Português. The page is divided into two columns. The left column is a sidebar with links to 'Literacy and Reading', 'More about this group', 'News', 'Events', 'Publications', 'Projects', 'Standing Committee', 'Conferences', 'Current Reading Research', 'Membership Information', and 'Minutes of Meetings'. At the bottom of the sidebar, it identifies the 'Web Editor for this group' as Robert Sarjant. The right column contains the main text, starting with 'Some practical suggestions' and an 'Introduction' section. The introduction states: 'The IFLA Section on Reading is pleased to present some practical suggestions for library staff who would like to help our society become more literate. We believe that libraries are uniquely situated to promote literacy. Libraries may develop and staff their own programs or they may support literacy projects sponsored by other organizations.' It then lists 'The aims of these practical pointers are:' followed by two bullet points: 'To encourage libraries to become involved in literacy programs' and 'To serve as an informal checklist for evaluating library-based programs that are already in place'.

Concluding reflections

During my month at UIL I have shared my input for the IFLA Guidelines and started compiling material for the best practice example for LitBase. I will continue to work with that material this summer. The month in Hamburg gave me a lot of ideas and inspiration for the future, both when it came to the Literacy for all network and IFLA. I will join IFLA and the Literacy & Reading section. One thing that I got a glance of was the nature of International work and networking. Lisa Krolak has long and rich experience of International work and collaborations, for example through ALADIN and IFLA, and it was great to have the opportunity to work close to her: it was certainly inspiring!

My time in Hamburg was an intense experience. It gave me the opportunity to get some insight of the work of Unesco, and how the Institute for Lifelong Learning functions. It also introduced me to the UIL Documentation Centre and Library, a special library in the field of adult education, lifelong learning and literacy. The staff, both in the library and at the Institute as a whole, was immensely generous and made me feel comfortable in the new environment. I hope I will keep contact with people from UIL, especially Lisa Krolak, who was my most perfect host in Hamburg.

It was also very rewarding to visit different places in Germany and visit a wide range of libraries. It gave me new perspectives on my own work and the public library situation in Sweden. During my visit in Germany I got the chance to strengthen old contacts and get some new ones, and altogether the trip - made possible with funding from Bibliothek & Information International (BI-International) - marks a pinnacle in my working life so far.