

Political perceptions of public libraries in the Netherlands

A study into the image held of public libraries by politicians, civil servants and policy makers. Part of international research by the Library Theory and Research Section of IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), undertaken under the authority of the Research Department of the Netherlands Public Library Association (NBLC).

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Summary

International study

What opinion do politicians and policy makers have of public libraries? This question has been examined under the authority of NBLC and by the IFLA Section of Library Theory and Research, so that results can be compared internationally.

The study is based on interviews with 37 politicians and 37 policy-making officials. It offers a qualitative insight in their foremost views on public libraries.

Insight into the differences

It appears that politicians and civil servants have different perceptions of public libraries. Whereas civil servants emphasise the cultural and information function of the public library, politicians seem to put much greater value on their social function.

Both groups of respondents however agree as to the importance of public libraries, although they also acknowledge that libraries have had insufficient attention from policy makers in recent years. Libraries have been subsidised as part of the course, without understanding or involvement in provision or end goals.

In general, the subsidies granted to libraries are too high. This highlights the importance given to libraries by Government. Grants are barely questioned because libraries are seen to reach a large number of people.

Client-supplier relationship

The innovation and restructuring of the public library sector, that must be implemented in years to come, demands that authorities take a different view of their role. This will have a positive effect on the involvement of politicians and civil servants in the public library sector, as their satisfaction increases when innovation is realised, services are distributed adequately and positive co-operation networks are built.

Inadequate contacts

The politicians and civil servants questioned in this study regard their poor contact with library administrators and managers as disadvantageous. The public library is seen as providing an essential public service, which contributes to the government policy. Most believe public libraries are essential for our democratic society and that users should be charged for lending materials.

Less agreement is expressed in relation to the educational support function of the public library, the idea that the public library should promote freedom of information, or that it is instrumental in realising changes in society.

This study offers an insight into the role civil servants, libraries, published standards, professional advice, public opinion, news reports and political ideologies play in the library policy decision-making process.

Few tools for objective evaluation

The respondents acknowledge the fact that they are unable to effectively measure the value of public libraries which means that evaluation becomes subjective. Financial aspects are too central as assessment criteria.

Both politicians and civil servants speak of the influence of ICT developments on the future of library work and they also mention numerous threats and opportunities for the sector.

Introduction

What influence does a government have on the public library work? For example, how much is a ministry interested in a library and its information services? What is the relationship between the various authorities and the professional library organisations? This kind of question prompted the IFLA Section on Library Theory and Research (LTR) to organise an international study through which answers could be found and compared.

Zero measurements were carried out in various countries in order to collect data for this study, which was co-ordinated by Professor Bob Usherwood of Sheffield University. This report shows the first results of the study carried out in the Netherlands.

What perception do politicians and policy-makers have about public libraries and what does this mean for different target groups? What is the value of these institutions in our Western democracy; do they contribute to economic development? To what extent do libraries help to realise government policies?

Justification

On 24 May, 2002 the NBLC received a request from the IFLA Section LTR, to co-operate in a study in which national, regional and municipal authorities would be interviewed on their views of public libraries.

Initially the reports were to be finished and presented at the 2002 IFLA Conference in Glasgow.

Stadsmonitor Vlissingen, the research department of the Public Library Vlissingen was commissioned to do the research.

In an extremely short timeframe, Stadsmonitor Vlissingen tried 38 times to interview national politicians, relevant policy-makers, advisors and assistants to members of Parliament, but succeeded in reaching only two people. Most of those who were approached found such an interview at the time pointless, due to the upcoming national elections and the tremendous political upheaval, created by enormous shifts in voters' behaviour.

Many political factions did not know who their spokesperson on the public library work would be.

Thus the initial completion date was not feasible.

Municipalities

After consultation with NBLC, it was decided in October 2002 to complete the study nevertheless and to put more emphasis on regional and municipal politicians and also civil servants who have a supportive function in policy making. This was because municipalities in the Netherlands often exercise a greater influence on the local library policy than in other European countries.

During the periods from the end of October to 12 December 2002 and 15 January to 3 February 2003, the interviewers approached 98 municipalities, of which 56 city councillors and civil servants were willing to co-operate. (See Appendix 1 for an overview). A number of city councillors could only speak of their experiences since their appointment following the municipal elections of 6 March 2002.

Regional politics

Additionally, ten representatives of the twelve provinces were willing to participate in a survey by telephone. It was noted that after the provincial elections of 11 March 2003 a number of respondents would no longer function in national politics.

National politics

The number of national politicians, willing to co-operate, was extended to eight. Four of these respondents are no longer active in national politics, due to the results of the national elections of 22 January 2003.

Expectations are that this study will prove a useful starting point in a sequence of qualitative measurements, however it is in itself too limited to be a representative sample.

Procedure

Before the actual questionnaire was put to the respondents, an appointment was made by telephone. Most interviews took between fifteen and thirty minutes. Civil servants found it especially difficult to give a particular point of view as they either spoke for themselves in their capacity as policy-maker or for the city councillor who was politically responsible.

It was agreed that the interviews would be published anonymously, in fact some respondents made this a condition of their co-operation.

Report

Where possible, the results are put into figures, i.e. in absolute numbers and percentages. We have distinguished between politicians and civil servants. The percentages do not always add up to 100%, due to rounding off.

In some questions the option of answering 'no opinion' was used, particularly by civil servants, because they only wanted to give the opinion of those who were politically accountable, but were unable to do so at the time.

Standardised questionnaire

The questions were kept as close as possible to those in the questionnaire composed by Professor Usherwood and being put to politicians and civil servants in a number of European countries.

Bibliography

Some of the respondents have sent us their policy reports, which we have analysed with reference to the questions put in the international study.

In addition, we have used several interviews with politicians and one civil servant, as published in *BibliotheekBlad*, issues 2001 and 2002.

Just before the publication of this report, a study into the current state of affairs relating to library innovation in the regions was published. This study has also been analysed with respect to the questions in our report.

The bibliography contains all publications that were explored.

The words 'library' or 'libraries' in this report refer to public libraries.

An Exploration

Responsibilities

The respondents were initially asked about their specific responsibilities within the organisation.

Respondents' responsibilities		
<i>Nature of responsibilities</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
National politician	9	12,2
Regional politician	5	6,7
Municipal politician	23	31,1
Civil servant policy-maker	16	21,6
Civil servant library policy	21	28,4
	74	100

Exactly half the respondents interviewed were politicians, of these four (11%) were women. Two-thirds of this category have final responsibility for the library policy within municipal politics.

The other half consisted of civil servants, of these twenty were men and seventeen were women. 57% of these civil servants were specifically responsible for library policy. The remaining civil servants were their managers and were therefore responsible for a broader policy portfolio.

Library functions

The respondents were then asked what they thought was currently the most important function of libraries. Only one reply was permitted.

Main library functions				
	<i>Politicians</i>		<i>Civil servants</i>	
<i>Function</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Cultural function	13	35,1	18	48,6
Information function	12	32,4	17	45,9
Social function	5	13,5	2	5,4
Educational function	2	5,4	0	0
Other function	5	13,5	0	0
	37	99,9	37	99,9

Whereas civil servants focus on the cultural and information function of the library, politicians also emphasise the social and educational function. What strikes one most is the fact that civil servants with specific responsibility for library policy almost unanimously find the information function of the library the most important. Managerial civil servants, on the other hand, give more importance to the function of reading promotion and culture.

Several politicians also mention other functions, such as:

- the portal function: the last remaining public function in a small village (3 x)
- the pedagogical function: the best way to focus the public attention on standards and values of society (1 x)
- the lending function: to put books and other materials at the disposal of the public (1 x)

The social function is mostly mentioned by municipal representatives in smaller communities.

The significance of libraries in daily policy work

The respondents were asked to give their opinion on the importance of library work within their organisation. The question was put to compare the library policy and other policy fields, because most respondents were responsible for more than one policy field.

Importance of library policy compared to other policy fields				
	<i>Politicians</i>		<i>Civil servants</i>	
<i>How important?</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Very important	0	0	0	0
Important	6	16,2	1	2,7
Unimportant	28	75,7	31	83,8
Very unimportant	3	8,11	3	8,11
No opinion	0	0	2	5,4
	37	100	37	100

Library policy apparently unimportant

The conclusion can be drawn that library policy is being perceived as unimportant within national, regional and local politics. Later on during the interviews it seemed that the respondents tended to qualify the severity of their statements. Most of them said that they do think library policy is important in itself, but less important politically compared to other policy fields.

On the one hand it is emphasised that library work is considered important, in view of the high subsidies compared to other social and cultural policy fields. But on the other hand it is said that library policy is far less important than, for example, infrastructure, housing policy, employment or security.

Half the civil servants responsible for library policy indicated that this field demands very little attention compared to their other responsibilities.

Moderate social importance of library services as government activity

Whereas the previous question expressed the importance of library services in the eyes of municipal, regional and national authorities, the next was about the importance of library services in comparison to all the other activities of the organisation (municipal, regional or national authorities).

Social importance of library services compared to other activities				
	<i>Politicians</i>		<i>Civil servants</i>	
<i>How important?</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Very important	0	0	1	2,7
Important	23	62,2	19	51,4
Unimportant	14	37,8	12	32,4
Very unimportant	0	0	0	0
No opinion	0	0	5	13,5
	37	100	37	100

High subsidies prove significance

Almost all respondents pointed out that the high subsidies granted to libraries in comparison to other policy fields, prove the significance of library services in the community.

Political debate hardly concerns itself with the libraries

Many of the respondents believe that the significance of library services is also reflected in the fact that the relatively high subsidies are granted without substantial political debate. Most libraries have been receiving their grants from the national authority for years, without much political discussion.

A large part of the public is reached

According to many respondents this phenomena exists due to the large section of the public that is reached by the library, which emphasises the importance of library services to the community.

Does your involvement with library work give you satisfaction?

This asked the degree of satisfaction the politicians and civil servants get in being involved with library work.

Does your involvement with library work give you satisfaction?				
	<i>Politicians</i>		<i>Civil servants</i>	
<i>Measure of satisfaction</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Extremely	1	2,7	3	8,1
A lot	7	18,9	9	24,3
Reasonable amount	21	56,8	17	45,9
Little	8	21,6	3	8,1
None	0	0	0	0
No opinion	0	0	5	13,5
	37	100	37	99,9

One-third of civil servants received a lot of satisfaction from their involvement with library work. Almost all of them stressed that this is mainly due to forthcoming library innovation, which will lead to authorities becoming more engaged in the content of library provision.

A stable policy field

Those respondents who found their involvement less satisfactory, give reasons such as:

- library policy hardly requires any attention;
- library policy has been the same for years;
- library policy is not a politically interesting dossier.

A number of civil servants state they have 'no opinion', because they felt that there was hardly any involvement with library policy and therefore any feeling of satisfaction cannot exist.

Concrete examples of satisfactory activities

Those respondents who claim to get satisfaction from their involvement with library work, gave specific examples. Each respondent was allowed more than one answer which is why the number of responses is higher than the number of respondents.

Concrete examples of satisfactory activities				
	<i>Politicians</i>		<i>Civil servants</i>	
<i>Concrete examples</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Realizing innovation	13	22,4	3	5,7
Improving co-operation	16	27,6	14	26,4
Defence of distribution policy	13	22,4	6	11,3
Defence of budgets	11	19,0	9	17,0
Improving marginal conditions		0	9	17,0
Solving administrative problems	1	1,7	1	1,9
Solving personnel problems		0	1	1,9
Enforcing library management	4	6,9	1	1,9
No opinion	0	0	9	17,0
	58	100	53	100,1

Co-operation, innovation, distribution: main challenges

It is striking that emphasis was put, by both politicians and civil servants, on the importance of improving co-operation between the libraries and other institutions. In the case of politicians, this is immediately followed by the importance of being able to realise innovation and maintain the level of distribution of libraries throughout the municipality or province.

Defence en problem solving attractive aspects

The fact that they are able to defend proposed budgets and marginal conditions gives the civil servants a fair amount of satisfaction, combined with their involvement in problem-solving. Nevertheless quite a number of civil servants were not able to give concrete examples.

Unsatisfactory aspects

The next questions sought to find which aspects made their involvement with the library work unsatisfactory. In this case more than one answer was also permitted.

Concrete examples of unsatisfactory aspects				
	<i>Politicians</i>		<i>Civil servants</i>	
Unsatisfactory aspects, examples	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>	<i>Absolutes</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Library administration does not set priorities	3	7,3	8	12,7
Library does not practise marketing	7	17,1	11	17,5
Hardly any contact	1	2,4	7	11,1
Little attention for library policy	2	4,9	6	9,5
No innovation strength in library sector	9	22,0	5	7,9
Little transparency	6	14,6	9	14,3
No exploitation of ICT opportunities	3	7,3	4	6,3
National policy forced upon municipality	7	17,1	3	4,8
Library sector too isolated	3	7,3	1	1,6
No opinion	0	0	9	14,3
	41	100	63	100

Lack of innovation and decisiveness

Among politicians there is the worrying notion that the sector is not innovative and decisive enough. Furthermore respondents fear that national library innovation policy will impose upon the municipalities financial consequences, without offering any compensation. Similar experiences in other sectors were mentioned.

Administration failures

Libraries are criticised by some civil servants for their lack of marketing skills and their poor administrative skills, stating that the only thing they do is ask for more money without making clear how they spend the existing subsidies.

A Significance of the public library

After a number of exploratory questions, which were intended to give some insight into the respondents and their involvement with library policy, they were asked about their opinion with respect to a series of propositions.

- The public library is an essential public good;
- Libraries contribute to the government's policy objectives;
- Libraries underpin education;
- Libraries promote social inclusion;
- Public libraries are an essential part of a democratic society;
- Libraries should promote freedom of information;
- Libraries have a capacity to make a difference in their communities;
- Charges should be introduced for the loan of books from public libraries.

The quantitative results can be found below, after which each proposition will be expanded on.

Respondents' opinion regarding eight propositions concerning libraries											
<i>Proposition</i>	Agree totally		Agree		No opinion			Do not agree		Do not agree at all	
	<i>Politicians</i>	<i>Civil servants</i>	<i>Politicians</i>	<i>Civil servants</i>	<i>Politicians</i>	<i>Civil servants.</i>	<i>Politicians</i>	<i>Civil servants</i>	<i>Politicians</i>	<i>Civil servants</i>	
Is an essential public good	51,4	37,8	48,6	62,2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Contribute to governments' policy objectives	8,1	21,6	91,9	67,6	0	10,8	0	0	0	0	
Underpin education	0	16,2	18,9	51,4	51,4	32,4	29,7	0	0	0	
Promote social inclusion	21,6	43,2	56,8	48,6	21,6	8,1	0	0	0	0	
Essential part of democratic society	35,1	29,7	64,9	67,6	0	2,7	0	0	0	0	
Should promote freedom of information	18,9	18,9	21,6	51,4	8,11	13,5	51,4	16,2	0	0	
Capacity to make a difference in their communities	2,7	16,2	18,9	27,0	8,11	48,6	70,3	8,2	0	0	
Charges should be introduced for the loan of books from public libraries	89,2	70,3	10,8	29,7	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Proposition 1: the public library is an essential public good

An essential public service

All respondents agree with this proposition, politicians more heartily than civil servants. The group that 'agrees totally' is dominated by representatives of regional and national politics.

Proposition 2: Libraries contribute to the government's policy objectives

Libraries serve as policy instruments

One in five civil servants agree totally with the proposition that libraries contribute to the government's policy objectives. One in ten does not offer an opinion. The politicians agree totally with this proposition.

Proposition 3: libraries underpin education

Important to support education

Disagreement comes only from municipal politicians. It is clear that civil servants understand the supportive educational role of the library. When clarifying, those respondents who disagree with this proposition indicate that the library in their area does not do anything for schools or other educational institutions.

Proposition 4: libraries promote social inclusion

Social inclusion supported

Both politicians and civil servants broadly support this proposition. It is striking that mainly regional and national politicians and only municipal civil servants express no opinion.

More civil servants than politicians totally agree with this proposition.

Proposition 5: libraries are an essential part of a democratic society

Essential for democracy

Apart from one civil servant who offers no opinion, all respondents agree with this proposition. Politicians somewhat more enthusiastically than civil servants, who express some doubt about the word 'essential' and interpret this as 'a most important aspect for democracy'.

Proposition 6: libraries should promote freedom of information

Promote intellectual freedom

Twenty-six out of thirty-seven civil servants support this proposition unconditionally. Those who oppose are irritated by the word 'propaganda' - used in the Dutch translation -, which is interpreted as undemocratic. (The unavoidable risk in translating the original English questions had an unfortunate and unforeseeable effect in this case, whereby in Dutch a negative association is made with the words 'propageren' and 'propaganda'. *Note MK*)

It is mainly municipal politicians who are more reserved with respect to this area, with just over half of them disagreeing. The municipal department of Information or Communication is seen to be more important in this role. It can be concluded that there is fear of a communication or information network for the community that will be difficult to control and in which the municipality plays no role.

Nobody questions the right to freedom of information, but those who disagree with this proposition do not want the library to be responsible for it.

Proposition 7: libraries have a capacity to make a difference in their communities

Civil servants see libraries making a difference

Civil servants recognise that libraries have the capacity to help support social change and make a difference in their communities, however most politicians disagree with this proposition. Civil servants highlight the wide reach that libraries have within the community, making them a useful instrument in reaching the public. They also point out that libraries have a reliable and neutral character.

Proposition 8: Charges should be introduced for the loan of books from public libraries

In favour of charging...

Although this proposition of charging fees would cause much debate internationally, its belief appears to be clear in the eyes of Dutch politicians and civil servants. All agree with this proposition of charging for the loan of books, politicians more strongly than civil servants.

... but no barriers!

Without exception the respondents set affordability as a condition to charging. Almost all say that a financial contribution by the customer must never form a barrier. Almost half of the politicians believe that the library should not have an income policy that keeps charges unreasonably low. Municipalities should provide assistance if the cost of library use threatens to be too high for certain sections of the population, e.g. by taking measures such as special financial aid or social renewal.

B The influence of 'Third parties' on decisions about the operation of library services

Who influences decisions about the operation of library services? Is it civil servants, professional associations, published standards, individual professional, public opinion, items in the media or political ideology?

Influence of third parties on decisions about the operation of library services								
'Third parties'	Very influential		Reasonably influential		Not very influential		No influence at all	
	Politicians	Civil servants	Politicians	Civil servants	Politicians	Civil servants	Politicians	Civil servants
Advice from civil servants	54,1	40,5	45,9	51,4	0	8,11	0	0
Advice from professional associations	32,4	56,8	37,8	24,3	29,7	18,9	0	0
Published standards	8,2	10,8	45,9	16,2	27,0	37,8	18,9	35,2
Advice from individual professionals	24,3	16,2	32,4	29,7	18,9	51,4	24,3	2,7
Public opinion	18,9	5,4	51,4	24,3	24,3	64,9	5,4	5,4
Items in the media	0	0	0	16,2	37,8	21,6	62,2	62,2
Political ideology	13,5	24,3	51,4	16,2	35,1	18,9	0	40,6

Civil servants

When asked, civil servants themselves think they are less influential than politicians. Both groups believe there is an influence, but seven out of thirty-seven civil servants think this influence minor.

Advice from Public Libraries

Both groups of respondents agree that public libraries have a lot of influence on national library policies. The civil servants tend to feel that this influence might be too large. They find that sometimes suggestions for library policy are followed with hardly any action, and that some municipalities simply follow the suggestions made by the library, without having their own agenda. Six politicians express the hope that local authorities will offer their own vision once their role as leader has been made clear.

On the other hand, seven civil servants say that it is logical for the local authorities to draw from the expertise of the library.

Published standards

At first the majority of the respondents said that published standards are influential, however they subsequently toned down their statements, as they were unable to provide examples of what these published standards might be.

Views on this subject differ widely. Regional and national politicians and civil servants are much more interested in published standards than their municipal colleagues. Published standards provide a clear framework and guidelines for minimum levels of service provision.

Those opposed to published standards, mainly operating on a local level, consider such a system as a straightjacket, forced upon them without any compensation to the municipality. All respondents would agree that municipalities should be enabled financially to improve library standards.

Advice from individual professionals

Almost all politicians receive advice, unsolicited or otherwise, from professionals, but civil servants are more aware of its influence. Much has to do with personal interaction. If a politician is able to name a particular professional, e.g. a museum director or educational manager, he gives that person a great deal of influence. If this is not the case, professional influence is deemed non-existent. Civil servants find it difficult to estimate the importance of such advice for politicians, particularly due to the fact that these contacts are informal.

Public opinion

Two in three politicians state that public opinion plays an important role in developing the national authority's library policy, because it represents electoral opinion. In contrast many civil servants feel that public opinion has hardly any influence at all, because libraries do not feature in the public's general opinions. They perceive the library sector as a quiet one, rarely discussed politically and hardly ever affected by doubt.

In two cases the public's influence was cited as a reaction to the proposed closure of a branch library, which proved to be very politically sensitive.

Items in the media

Politicians consider the influence of news items on the development of library policy very minor. 'Our policy is not determined by the everyday news!' they claim. However a small number of civil servants demonstrated examples that some news items had resulted in changes in library policy.

Political ideology

Whereas politicians find their political ideology relevant to library policy, civil servants contradict this. They believe the political nature of the responsible city councillor or provincial representative is unimportant, because library work is broadly supported by city council and provincial executives. In cases to the contrary, the civil servants attribute this to the personality of the politician concerned rather than their party.

C Defining and judging library policy

In this final module six questions were asked about the what influences priority setting and evaluation.

- What evidence do you use to assess the value and impact of the public library service?
- What is the single most important thing that influences you when taking decisions about the public library service?
- What are the main ways you keep yourself informed about the needs and attitudes of the public regarding library services?
- How do you think advances in information and computer technology will affect the public library service?
- What are your hopes and fears for the public library service over the next ten years?
- Do you think there is anything of importance about the public library service in [name of country) which I have not asked or to which I have not given enough attention?

What evidence do you use to assess the value and impact of the public library service?

Many respondents found this question difficult to answer. Both politicians and civil servants admitted they judge the library primarily on the basis of financial results and limited figures concerning numbers of users and loaned materials. The provincial and national representatives cited examples such as effectiveness of the network, results of co-operation with other sectors and the way libraries were able to innovate their services and reach certain target groups. No concrete or objective information was available. Two of the respondents mentioned a publication by VNG: *Aandachtspunten voor bibliotheekbeleid*, which they use when evaluating the library

What is the single most important thing that influences you when taking decisions about the public library service?

Representatives of local authorities site the financial framework as the most decisive factor, and it is this that limits the freedom of action within policy making. A second, important aspect is the extent to which innovation is present. One of the respondents (a city councillor) put it very clearly: 'Moaning about more money for existing services doesn't get me very far. But if the library is able to present us with innovative and unexpected proposals which also reflect and support our policies, I'm more than willing to fight for them.'

A number of respondents believe government policy in this field is being developed in a rather unprofessional way. 'We can't seem to succeed in comparing the library interests with the interests of street maintenance or building new houses. In the council everyone points to the level of library subsidies, while it is almost nothing compared to the funds spent on city renewal.'

What is missing are good instruments which objectively measure the value of the library. One civil servant told of how concrete figures of numbers of library users in comparison with those of other social-cultural institutions in the city, had suddenly lead to more funding for the library.

What are the main ways you keep yourself informed about the needs and attitudes of the public regarding library services?

A little over a quarter of the respondents state they have users surveys available. What position those survey results have in other provinces, is unknown. The positive character of these surveys makes a big impression, but at the same time leaves a questions to be answered. Many respondents admit there is still much to be learned about the publics' wishes, but nothing has been done to address this. Civil servants especially, feel that it is up to the library to collect such information. One out of five respondents receives *BibliotheekBlad* on a regular basis and the majority use it to obtain information. One in three respondents surf the website of the NBLC occasionally.

How do you think advances in information and computer technology will affect the public library service?

More than half the respondents did not have an answer. Eighteen respondents gave various responses, including:

- The internet will improve access to library services.
- It will be easier to ask questions virtually.

- Libraries will have to gain a great deal of knowledge and skills to be able to keep up in this field.
- The library must pave the way for everybody to have access to digital information, and use it effectively.
- Many people will no longer visit the library and will instead find information through the Internet.
- In the future the library will become accessible 24 hours a day.
- Library costs will be sky high because of the investments necessary.
- When everybody has their own home computer, the library will have little involvement in ICT.
- Libraries should be *the* authority on ICT in our community and should play an important role in supporting schools and other non-profit organisations.
- The library has been 'playing with its books' too long to acquire any ICT expertise
- Libraries should teach not only their customers, but also more challenging target groups, to work with computers.

What are your hopes and fears for the public library service over the next ten years?

All respondents gave one or more answers, which follow below in order of decreasing frequency:

Opportunities:

- Increasing interest in the knowledge community, in which the library has an important part to play
- Increasing use of ICT
- The professional service of the library, which can be of assistance to other organisations
- The large part of the public that is reached by the library
- Increasing need for information
- The public's demand to be informed through a variety of channels
- The opportunity for other organisations to have a presence in the library
- The strong distribution of libraries throughout the country
- Restructuring of the library sector offers new possibilities for co-operation
- The image of reliability and quality

Threats:

- Increasing costs of library work
- Governmental interference with library work, without financial remuneration
- Lack of expertise in ICT and marketing
- Stuffy image of library work
- Unavoidable closing of branch libraries (as seen with small bank branches)
- People tend to read less
- Library is too predictable
- Lack of decision making skills within the library
- Lack of entrepreneurial flair within the library
- Non-transparent decision-making and evaluation of the library
- Lack of interest in the content of library services
- Libraries only make the news when short of money
- Libraries do not show any involvement with topical themes such as security or the communication between citizens and government and thus miss the opportunity for innovation
- It is not possible to compare library results with those of other non-profit organisations

Do you think there is anything of importance about the public library service in [name of country) which I have not asked or to which I have not given enough attention?

Most respondents indicated that the interview could be concluded. Four of the civil servants mentioned other aspects:

- A Library Law should be re-instated in order to more effectively manage the government subsidy to library sector
- The planned enlargement of scale will not in itself lead to an improvement in library services. We are concerned with the quality of library management. It is difficult to find new library administrators, just as it is within the educational field
- The current informal relationship between politicians and library administrators should be converted to a more structured one
- Something needs to be done about the introvert character of libraries.

Appendix 1: Overview of random samples and response

Municipalities and their numbers of inhabitants*):

1	Aa en Hunze	25 208
2	Aalsmeer	22 662
3	Achtkarspelen	28 013
4	Alphen a/d Rijn	70 162
5	Amersfoort	128 035
6	Amstelveen	77 370
7	Arnhem	139 329
8	Assen	59 006
9	Barendrecht	30 976
10	Barneveld	48 298
11	Bemmel	41 172
12	Bergen (NH.)	31 687
13	Bernheze	28 664
14	De Bilt	42 056
15	Bodegraven	19 633
16	Breda	162 308
17	Buren	25 239
18	Coevorden	35 502
19	Delft	96 180
20	Deventer	85 008
21	Dongen	24 856
22	Dronten	35 591
23	Ede	102 405
24	Emmen	107 422
25	Enkhuizen	17 033
26	Etten-Leur	37 784
27	Gemert-Bakel	27 683
28	Gouda	71 782
29	Groningen	174 250
30	Haarlem	148 377
31	Harderwijk	40 186
32	Heerenveen	41 250
33	Hellevoetsluis	38 861

34	Hengelo (O.)	80 433
35	Heusden	42 935
36	Hilversum	82 773
37	Hoogeveen	52 782
38	Hoorn	65 764
39	Huizen	42 099
40	IJsselstein	30 923
41	Kerkrade	51 066
42	Langedijk	24 205
43	Leeuwarden	89 453
44	Leusden	28 833
45	Lichtenvoorde	19 224
46	Loon op Zand	22 911
47	Maarssen	40 305
48	Maastricht	122 163
49	Meerssen	20 246
50	Midden-Drenthe	32 813
51	Moerdijk	36 456
52	Naaldwijk	29 061
53	Nieuwegein	62 345
54	Noordoostpolder	43 669
55	Nunspeet	26 139
56	Oldenzaal	31 111
57	Oss	66 887
58	Overbetuwe	39 731
59	Raalte	36 403
60	Renkum	32 236
61	Ridderkerk	46 542
62	Roermond	45 159
63	Roosendaal	76 769
64	Rotterdam	595 255
65	Schiedam	76 102
66	Schouwen-Duiveland	34 194

67	Sittard-Geleen	97 950
68	Sliedrecht	23 664
69	Smallingerland	53 010
70	Soest	44 622
71	Stadskanaal	33 517
72	Stein	26 432
73	Terneuzen	34 498
74	Tiel	39 608
75	Tubbergen	20 022
76	Utrecht	256 420
77	Veendam	28 328
78	Venlo	90 500
79	Vlaardingen	73 675
80	Voorhout	13 898
81	Waalwijk	45 278
82	Weert	48 151
83	Werkendam	26 120
84	Weststellingwerf	25 247
85	Wijchen	38 428
86	Wijk bij Duurstede	23 155
87	Winterswijk	28 672
88	Woerden	46 921
89	De Wolden	23 784
90	Woudrichem	14 264
91	Zaltbommel	25 660
92	Zeewolde	18 379
93	Zeist	59 844
94	Zevenaar	26 191
95	Zoetermeer	110 129
96	Zuidhorn	18 100
97	Zutphen	35 694
98	Zwijndrecht	41 409

*) Municipalities in which an approach to do an interview by telephone was unsuccessful have been printed in grey.

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