

10 Advocacy at the Community Level

At local level, libraries are sometimes assigned to the cultural sector, sometimes to the education sector, and sometimes to the central administration. The smaller the municipality, the more likely it is that the bodies responsible for culture and education will be combined; in general, these responsibilities play a subordinate role in smaller municipalities. It is much more important for the library management to develop an excellent relationship, especially with the administration, however, the situation is different in cities where the political structure is reflected in the different responsibilities of the elected body and its committees.

10.1 Library Advocacy at the Community/ Municipality Level

Advocacy in municipalities is characterised by the difficult situation of many municipalities, who have a lack of resources and high debts. In addition, most municipalities have few parts of their budgets that are not determined by their various duties; as a result, there is always a risk that local politicians will use the library budget for other plans if the library does not advocate for the budget and convince local politicians of its value, with a high level of awareness and active response crucial at such moments to protect the library budget. Where local authorities fund the public library, librarians' advocacy at this level varies widely. While some librarians are extremely successful, the majority are more passive and give up too early, which may be due to the particular situation in small communities. In many countries, the administration has more weight than politicians because they stay longer in office. Librarians are successful when they have excellent communication with the local administration and politicians, and actively lobby for additional resources.

“To enhance the effectiveness of public libraries in pursuing their mission, library executives and library champions must ensure that they keep libraries on the agenda of their communities and funding bodies” (Anderson and Jones 2006) is the clear recommendation for Australian public libraries. It is not only important for public libraries to be recognised by their users as providing the right mix of innovative services, but also as having a well-structured advocacy agenda and to cultivate partnerships with government and the private sector. “With so many demands placed upon central and local government funds, libraries need to be in a position to demonstrate to decision-makers how important they are for their communities” (Anderson and Jones 2006).

Many public libraries around the world rely solely on donations from individuals and foundations: private organisations in Africa, private book clubs in South America or small public libraries supported by religious institutions around the world. It takes a lot of active advocacy to get support from the municipal or regional budget, which is ultimately the most sustainable source. In countries where the public library budget is part of the municipal budget, regular income seems to be secured. In the USA, the library budget is often funded by a tax in the community, and the library must advocate for a tax increase for library development or a new library building.

The Public Library Association (PLA) has developed a special training programme for public libraries on how to advocate and gain support from the community and policymakers (PLA 2014), which is extremely helpful as a good standing in the community supports library advocacy at a political level. It is also important to give examples and use storytelling of what libraries do for people in small communities and rural areas, for example with the case of the Orang Asli, the Indigenous people of Malaysia, who are scattered throughout the countryside. For these people, the libraries, in addition to all their other services, have the function of a post office, which is an additional service that can be used for advocacy as it shows that “libraries leave no one behind” (Begum 2022).

Local authorities can be very powerful, as their staff have often been in office much longer than the elected mayor and it is mainly the finance department whose prior approval is needed for decisions on the budget to be taken. Is advocacy possible under these conditions? Small libraries often feel left out of the municipal administration. Although they are subordinate to the administration, they are usually not involved in the administration’s internal communication and must look after themselves in order to maintain good relations. However, if they can develop a good relationship with the administration, this can be the basis for their success.

While in larger cities it is certainly possible to change negative administrative decisions by advocating elected members of the city council, this is rarely the case in small communities. Therefore, the focus is on the exchange of arguments and persuading the responsible officials and managers of the municipal administration. In most cases, an attempt is made to win over the mayor and as many other personalities in the community as possible, considering the constellations between them, with relationships with the head of the relevant department and the councillors on the relevant committee also a necessary basis for this. The mayor, if he does not represent the education or culture sector himself, is always an additional contact for the library; as mayors are interested in being mentioned in press releases, Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as Instagram photos of libraries’ positive events are shared with them. Libraries themselves need to see local politicians as a target group and systematically contact them through tar-

geted communication management to clarify their importance in urban societies (Kamm-Schuberth 2019).

The public library can only develop in the community if the management is interested in local politics, follows political developments in the community and gets to know the different actors well. Whenever there are local elections, this is a particularly good opportunity to communicate and discuss the concerns of librarians with local politicians. However, when there is change, it is sometimes difficult to maintain good relationships with all decision-makers, which is why librarians always need to talk to the opposition at an early stage. Competition with other cultural and educational institutions such as museums, theatres, art galleries and community colleges in larger cities can create some challenges, but as public libraries cover all areas of culture and education through the provision of books and other media, they can always reach out to everyone, offer partnerships and display their diversity.

Building up the library's own network in local clubs and associations is an important prerequisite, as community representatives are also active in these areas and can be easily approached. The actual meeting of the cultural committee or the local council will no longer be of crucial importance if the librarian has been able to inform the individual representatives in other contexts beforehand and persuade them with good arguments. Kamm-Schuberth speaks of a three-stage model for gradually winning over local politicians to the public library: firstly, to use information to turn local politicians into experts and connoisseurs of public libraries; secondly, to try to involve local politicians in active participation to deal more intensively with library issues and delve deeper into the topic; and thirdly, through participation the local politician must become familiar with the topic, develop arguments and emotional empathy and finally become an advocate for public libraries (Kamm-Schuberth 2019).

Success in these steps depends on several things, and not everyone will end up being a great friend of the library. But it can be effective to attempt long-term communication with various stakeholders to develop mutual trust, until a former councillor takes over as chair of the Friends of the Library. In fact, we see in later examples that many librarians grow into this role of communicating with community leaders and advocating well for their institution. Whether it is a big city, a small town or a rural community, the library always needs partners and cooperation to be successful in its advocacy work. Some examples from the local level are described after this section. As there are no descriptions of exactly how librarians influence decision-makers, only processes that can be deduced from publicly available documents can be presented here. In recent years, many municipalities have set up an electronic archive of the minutes of their municipal council meetings, where it is possible to research when and with what topic the local public library is on the agenda.

The example of Birmingham's Community Library Service is notable, as it shows a 12-week consultation process with feedback from citizens in 2017 (see Figure 30). One branch even had a "library lobby campaign group" working with other organisations for a sustainable partnership to support the library service and make suggestions on how the budget cut could be implemented without having a significant



Fig. 30: Birmingham City Council 2017 Screenshot. By Claudia Lux.

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/55/library_plans_revised_after_consultation

detrimental impact. Solutions are being found for all the libraries and, although there was a budget cut, extra money was planned for repairs and investment in new technology to improve self-service facilities for library users.

10.2 Library Advocacy in Large Cities

Advocating for libraries in large cities has its own challenges, seen with the Shanghai Library, a public and research library. Founded in 1952, it opened a new 83,000 m² building in December 1996 with the library management starting a new library construction project only ten years later to get more space for the growing collection, the new technology and the increasing use of the library. However, advocating for the new Shanghai Library East project was not easy. Although the library management prepares everything in detail, the government officials asked for plans to be revised several times. The library director was a legislator in the Shanghai People's Congress for five years, but this did not help much, and it was difficult for him to advocate for the new building, as many other city projects were in the pipeline and the library was not a top priority. The main library has many stacks in the 24-storey building and additional stacks on the outskirts of Shanghai. For ten years, the library management has been negotiating with all kinds of people in the Shanghai government but, suddenly, in 2016, ten years after the first plan, the Shanghai municipal government came to the library; acknowledging that they had a ready plan for the new building, the government told the library that they were looking for targets to spend their money on, and that there was enough money to build the new library, with one condition; it had to be a world-class library, but not full of books. Shanghai's leadership made it clear that in the future smart city of Shanghai, the new library would never be built if the plans were still "book-centred"; they had to be "people-centred". The library director's advocacy thus shifted its focus from the government leaders to the library staff, who asked why they should call it a library. After the director explained, the staff became used to the idea and accepted the modern concept. The library's management was delighted, and a new plan was quickly drawn up to meet the government's requirements, with many famous architects bidding for the contract. The new Shanghai East Library, which opened in October 2022, has a small area for stacks but large areas for people's activities, overlooking the trees of the park (Wu 2022) (see Figure 31).

"Be prepared" is one of the clear messages of this Chinese success story. With the economy booming, the city of Shanghai was in a position to finance major projects, with the library project on the table. Importantly, the library management was open to negotiating with government officials about the new building



Fig. 31: Shanghai Library East. Photo by ©SHL ©ChrisHardie.

and was willing to revise the plans immediately. The report also shows that advocacy only works with library staff (see chapter 13.3); the director presents the case to the government, but then the library must adapt to the policymakers' ideas, and the director must advocate to the library staff. In China, as in many other countries, strong arguments are important for advocacy, but good relationships are far more important.

In general, advocacy for libraries in a large city (see chapter 15 for more examples) must take into account the many other actors in the cultural and educational field. Cooperation is an especially important part of advocacy in a city, and competition needs to be analysed. On the other hand, many educational, cultural and social issues give the library a good opportunity to offer its support to provide solutions and to show competence and excellence in its field.

10.3 Library Advocacy in a Small Town in Germany: The Example of Bruchköbel

Bruchköbel is a small town in Germany with around 20,000 inhabitants in the Main-Kinzig district. Bruchköbel's public library is part of one of the four departments of the town council, Department IV Youth, Senior Citizens, Social Affairs, Culture. The town has a good council information system where all council proposals can be viewed, and a search for the term "library" in Bruchköbel's public records shows ten documents between June 2016 and May 2021 that dealt with the municipal library as an issue in the city council, excluding the documents on COVID-19 measures in libraries (Stadt Bruchköbel 2021).

Here is a brief overview of the mentions of the library in Bruchköbel City Council, which are typical of library-related issues at municipal level. In May 2021, the library received funding from the national programme *Neustart Kultur*, which was specifically mentioned in a council meeting. Although there are no further statements in the minutes, it can be assumed that this has increased the positive image of the library. Since December 2019, the library has been able to offer free Wi-Fi installed by the city, proving that the library was among the first organisations to be equipped with this service. Elsewhere, the inclusion of the library in the Bruchköbel volunteer card, which now includes a 50% discount on the library card, add to the positive image of the library. Meanwhile, most of the issues in the committees or in the town council concern the staffing and the budget of the institution. In 2019, the library in Bruchköbel was able to take on a trainee, with the mayor reporting that the trainee would be taken on by the municipal library after completing her training, with the aim of using this position to extend opening hours and expand the range of services for young people. In the draft budget for 2019, the library aimed to successfully include investment measures, namely the replacement of a 30-year-old counter and the purchase of replacement PCs and tablets. In the annual report for 2019, which like all annual reports submitted by the City Library and distributed in the City Council can be found online, the picture of the redesigned counter was published immediately after the title page (Stadtbibliothek Bruchköbel 2020). In this way, councillors could immediately see the positive result of their decision to support the library.

Before the documents go to the council or committees, the library's concerns are discussed with the relevant department and then with the mayor of Bruchköbel. This means that several decision-makers must be convinced before a proposal is put to a vote in the town council, which is a typical and probably the most important part of the preparation: first convincing the department to which the library is assigned, then the head of department, the mayor and the coalition partner. The librarian is often absent from these discussions, and it is up to the

administrator to make the case for the library. What is lost in this communication can only be corrected by direct prior information or parallel information to the head of department or the mayor; the shorter and clearer the argument, the more insightful it will be in the cases mentioned: the counter is 30 years old, taking on the trainees will extend opening hours and youth work. The question is whether and how the relevant department and the officer or advisor will put the same energy into the library's request, or whether there are other institutions that can present even more convincing arguments which will be given preference. The next levels are the head of department and the treasurer, both of whom may also have questions or difficulties with the library's request. Compromises are most likely to be accepted when the request and offer are cost neutral, such as in the example above where the trainee was taken on because another position was offered – a vacant full-time position in a lower grade in exchange for a part-time professional position for the trainee.

If the library regularly advocates the higher administrative unit, arguments and examples can be used to promote its cause, which can be based on the library's work and success stories. In any case, the argumentative conviction of this level is crucial, and it becomes immediately clear whether the reasons presented are sufficient. The advocacy is extended to individual councillors in order to win them over to the library's demands before the issue is even on the agenda, with this process intensified if and when the administration reacts negatively and in the case of important projects. Successful advocacy was certainly necessary when the public library in Bruchköbel wanted to develop a joint regional library card with two other communities, Hanau and Rodenbach, and overcome the many bureaucratic problems along the way. The mayor of Bruchköbel presented the draft to the town council, with an initial supply of library cards from the Department for Public Libraries at the State Ministry of Culture meaning that the project could be implemented without financial support from the municipalities. All three municipalities of the Main-Kinzig district had to decide on the regional library card at their meetings and, in the end, there were three mayors in a remarkably successful photo session (see Figure 32).

The combination of building a positive image through annual reports and additional activities, such as the "Book & Breakfast" programme uploaded to YouTube by the Bruchköbel municipal library during the COVID-19 pandemic, and raising additional funds, supports successful advocacy. Asking the local authority to support the library's demands is a successful approach, as it increases the library's visibility and thus trust in the institution.



Fig. 32: Hanau, Bruchköbel and Rodenbach starting a common library card. Photo: Katrin Stassig/
www.op-online.de.

<https://www.op-online.de/region/hanau/hanau-hanau-bruchkoebel-rodenbach-starten-regionalen-bibliotheksausweis-13162741.html>

10.4 Library Advocacy for Public Libraries using a Library Strategic Plan

Developing a library strategic plan is a special kind of advocacy that is now being used successfully by more and more public libraries, large and small. The first step is to inform the policymaker about the idea of developing a strategic plan, with the second step to get information from the local authority about the main strategy of the city or town to be used in the plan. Finally, the strategic plan should be presented to the city council or other political decision-makers in the municipality. In this way, the plan helps to draw attention to the library's development.

There are many great examples of public library strategic plans around the world, such as Taipei Public Library which has been publishing strategic plans since 2005. An early draft of the strategic plan is submitted to the Library Affairs Committee for guidance before the plan is approved and published. The latest one explains the process of developing the strategic plan:

Planning Process

- Library related environmental scan.
- Status Quo: Review statistics of the library's collection, services and programs.
- Taipei's city environment: Consider demographic composition, digital city development, Taipei City's strategic map.
- Establish taskforce. Library and Information Professional Outlook: take into account the library's core values, the public library's role, IFLA global vision report, IFLA trend report, the UN's 2030 sustainable development goal pledge
- Strategic plans of international libraries: reference the strategic documents of the US, Canada, Finland, Denmark, New Zealand
- Administer SWOT analysis. Solicit vision designs within the library. Vote on vision designs.
- Early draft of strategic plan. Submit to the library affair institute for instruction.
- Institute the 2021–2025 Taipei Public Library's Strategic Plan. Adjust strategic initiative's KPI by rolling strategy annually. Survey the execution of initiatives biannually (Taipei Public Library 2020).

The planning process of Tapei Public Library shows in detail how the library works with values, policy papers from IFLA and UN and reviews of model strategic plans in libraries in different countries. The plan includes the library affairs committee as a political and administrative focus and, by achieving the strategic goals, the annual report can be used for advocacy.

The Johannesburg Public Library, South Africa, summarises its strategic outcomes and strategic objectives in a single page (Joburg Department [2018]). Depending on the country and the type of people in the city council, the library strategy can be long and substantive as with Taipei, short as with Johannesburg, or very fancy and illustrated as with Chicago, where the mayor was quoted in the public library strategy 2020–2024:

My belief in the essential role of the library is both personal and profound. From my first day as mayor, I have worked to ensure expanded access to library services. We eliminated fine barriers that once prevented so many patrons from accessing the vast resources and opportunities the library offers for learning, skills development, and fun. Lori E. Lightfoot (Chicago Public Library 2020).

Quotes like this are excellent examples and good results of successful advocacy, as the mayor not only presents herself in the strategy, but also propagates the main result of advocacy against fines in the Chicago Public Library.

In Oldenburg, a city in north-west Germany, the public library is developing a strategic plan and presenting it to decision-makers. The strategic plan of the Oldenburg City Library includes an analysis of the environment, a description of social problems, a task profile and a framework for action for the city library, as well as measures and offers for the community. It also describes the library's cooperation with partners and networks and its communication with politics, administration,

users and partners, and includes information on technical equipment, other resources, organisational and management principles and aspects of monitoring and evaluation.

A library strategic plan does not replace the annual report of the past year's results, which is needed by policymakers to report on the progress of said plan. However, the library strategic plan has its own importance in that it places the library in the context of the city's environmental analysis and thus gives the mayor and the city council a new perspective on the library.

In Oldenburg, the communication with the political decision-makers takes place through the head of the city's cultural department, with a short version of the plan also presented to the cultural committee, while communication with the higher levels of administration takes place through official channels, including regular consultations. The library's strategic plan is drawn up in consultation with the administration and then presented to the mayor (Janssen 2016, 39), with a copy officially presented to the mayor of Oldenburg at a press event in the library.

The example of the city of Oldenburg shows that the successful creation of a library strategic plan is presented to political decision-makers so that further development of the library can be politically supported and decided. With the strategic plan, the library articulates its staffing and budget needs in a well-founded way and presents them to the city council in a forward-looking manner.

The development of a library strategy or plan needs to be discussed with the local authority from the outset and interim results should be communicated. Commissioning the municipality to produce such a plan will most likely result in politicians being interested in discussing the final plan or reading the report. In principle, all library strategies serve to justify the additional need for the library, however, the library strategic plan alone is no substitute for intensive advocacy of the relevant political decision-makers. This should take place at the latest during the drafting process, and it would be even better to involve some relevant people in the development of the library strategy from its beginning. But even if the local authority does not take responsibility, a library strategy in communication with the public can demonstrate the professionalism of the library and thus improve its image (see Figure 33). The goals and actions proposed in the plan will be the starting point for ongoing library advocacy until the city administration and council respond.

10.5 Summary of Community Advocacy

There is a need for more research and presentation of the specific activities of library advocacy at the community level. At this level, library advocacy is not about

