

16 Pitfalls in Library Advocacy

Pitfalls in advocacy are relatively common, as not all constellations are always carefully considered, and an opportunity is seized hastily with no result. In most cases, the mistakes can be corrected during a longer advocacy process. However, even a promising project can fail completely.

16.1 Mistakes in Policy Assessment

The following example of an attempt to exercise power in politics, where one's own interests are to be asserted against the interests of others, can be presented as an error in library policy. It serves to illustrate the need not to rush into action and thus to avoid making the same mistake again.

The former Federal Union of German Library Associations held a press conference in Berlin in 2001 to denounce the declining acquisition budgets of university libraries and to announce their demands. A representative of the liberal party took part in the press conference. During the question-and-answer session that followed, he invited the BDB to present its demands to a parliamentary committee of the German *Bundestag*, as this was an important issue. The president of the BDB, pleased by this reaction from a politician, responded immediately. In fact, a committee meeting was held shortly afterwards, to which the BDB was invited to present its request for more acquisition budgets for universities. During the committee meeting, various parties responded to the BDB's concerns in a friendly but mostly negative manner, which did not prevent the liberal party representative from submitting a draft resolution on acquisition budgets for universities to the *Bundestag* a little later, which was totally rejected. Such behaviour by some party members also occurs at regional levels. The BDB made the mistake of accepting the invitation of the opposition party member without contacting other parties in the Bundestag committee and without holding preliminary talks on the subject with the government parties. Without the active, pro-active involvement of the governing parties, an issue will not be adopted in a committee; only proposals that are successful in the committees have a positive chance on the agenda in the *Bundestag*. For this reason, inclusion in the *Bundestag* is a deliberately orchestrated show of failure by the opposition party member to gain attention and party points elsewhere. The legitimate interests of the BDB in increasing the acquisition budgets of the universities cannot be enforced against the majority of the governing parties. In reality, this means that the issue cannot be addressed for a long time to come.

Some regional associations in Germany have had a similar experience in their efforts to get library laws passed in the federal states. For several years they were repeatedly asked by the opposition in the regional parliaments to help draft a library law, which was then introduced by the opposition in the parliament and failed. In some *Länder*, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) have alternately asked for library bills, but as soon as they were in government, the library bill project was shelved; the library associations reminded the parties that they supported the library bill when they were in opposition, but to no avail. Indeed, it took an emotional speech by former German President Horst Köhler at the reopening of the Herzogin-Anna-Amalia Library in Weimar after the fire (Köhler 2007) for the Prime Minister of Thuringia to spontaneously promise a library law. Was it the power of words that brought about this change of heart, through the influence of library representatives and the successful advocating at a cultural breakfast with the Federal President? Or was it still the shock of the fire tragedy? It was certainly the right moment. Regardless, the Prime Minister kept his promise and in July 2008 the first library law in Germany was passed in the Land of Thuringia. It was a good thing that the parties in the state parliament had worked out a joint library law beforehand.

Shortly after the Cultural Study Commission published its final report in favour of library legislation and before the Thuringian library law was passed, the Green Party in the German *Bundestag*, at the time in opposition, wanted to introduce a basic bill for a library law into the *Bundestag*. The parliamentary group contacted the Library Association and, in a joint meeting with the leader of the parliamentary group, the library association made it clear that it would not support a motion from the opposition alone, as experience had shown that this was a trap. In addition, a motion rejected in the *Bundestag* would potentially rule out a renewed discussion of the issue for a long time. In this case, the Library Association had to take up the opposition's friendly offer, but it had to weigh up its advocating tactics carefully and try not to get involved in politics without a chance of success.

Mistakes in advocacy usually do not lead to further success in the long run and, as a result, a project may have to be put on hold for some time before it can be taken up again. In some cases, it may be possible to see the discussion of library issues (acquisition budget, legislation) as a kind of marketing for library issues and as training for parliamentarians to understand the background of libraries. In this respect, alliances with the opposition can also be made in the sense of marketing to get better connections to other relevant party representatives. In this case, the library association does not need to do much detailed work on the issue because it does not expect the opposition motion to be successful

anyway. However, it is problematic when the opposition speaks on behalf of the library association and the association itself has little opportunity to make new contacts with other members of a committee, with the issue quickly burning out as a result.

A mistake was also made when librarians in their country, which is not mentioned here, did not do things in the right way in a discussion about copyright, as the following report shows. The meeting was an opportunity to do some good things, and the approach that the association took was purely focused on the issue of public lending rights; the lobbying was ineffective and the whole thing fell apart. It seems that the association tried to centralise what they were doing and do things on an individual basis when it would have been smarter to do it as a group. It could also have been a miscalculation in what was said, because it is not a comfortable position to be totally against something when you go into a discussion with the other side. There were many other opportunities there to push for positive reforms and create a more positive narrative, but they put forward the negative arguments when things needed to be put in a positive light (Wyber 2022).

The Minister of Finance is the target of the Library and Information Association of South Africa. Although the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) advocates support for the construction of new libraries to create a reading culture, it also wants to stimulate the reading culture, but books are expensive in South Africa. So, the library association decided to advocate the government to reduce VAT on books, and was able show how this is done in other countries in general and also for educational institutions. However, LIASA wrote to the Minister of Finance, but without any response or result (Tise 2022).

The Dongguan Library in China also gives a negative example. Dongguan is a megacity for the IT manufacturing industry and many people study information technology, and the library thought that a specialised IT library would be a great service for the city and a good argument to make. But the project did not work out, and the library had to understand that there was an obvious time gap for such a service. The contradiction between rapid updating and iteration of knowledge and the relatively lagging ability of libraries to provide literature and knowledge always exists, and the capacity to build and run an IT library was inadequate, meaning they had to stop (Li 2022).

In Finland, librarians wanted to follow the example of the Australian librarians who had successfully fought for salaries some years previous. All their documents were translated and based on these the Finnish librarians started to campaign for a pay rise. They produced some materials, ran a salary campaign and had a small demonstration in the centre of Helsinki, but all this was useless; it was too spontaneous and there was too little analysis, too few resources and

too little effort. The campaign showed all the problems of spontaneous actions, but the library association learned to always analyse the background and the real situation before starting something (Haavisto 2022).

16.2 Trust Abused

Another example of how publisher's lobbyists use power factors is in copyright issues. After much discussion and persuasion, the Copyright Knowledge Society Act in Germany, which clarifies how excerpts from copyrighted works can be freely used in education and science, was given an indefinite life in the draft of summer of 2021, however, a limitation of the law to 2023 was suddenly inserted into the law at the very last moment, with the success of the achievement of the scientific barrier of copyright cancelled out by the negative time limit which was suddenly imposed (Schleihagen 2021). It took almost three years of active advocating by universities, scientific institutions and library associations to get the time limit removed from the law, with this example illustrating once again not to forget the principle of power in politics.

The director of Aarhus Public Library was called by a journalist from the local newspaper, whom he really trusted, during the fight for the new main library. The journalist told him that there was a new majority for a new main library and asked him to comment on it, to which he said "fantastic", being quoted in the paper. The problem was that the person in charge of the library on the city commission was from a political party that was not part of the majority, and the journalist had not told the director this. When the politician called the director, he was terribly angry because you don't do that to your own councillor, and it took some time to rebuild the good relationship. In advocacy, it is important to know the political arena very well and to be careful with journalists (Hapel 2022).

16.3 Advocacy Mistakes in Behaviour

Minor advocacy mistakes, which can be easily avoided, occur because of the behaviour of some librarians who complain loudly in public and at events about a big problem in their library. This can quickly give the impression that the library management is always complaining about problems and cannot solve them. Complaining can be done but the question is: when should it not be done? Of course, the library director complains directly to the administration, and if a disaster has occurred, this must be made clear. Public events with the mayor or other deci-

sion-makers are not the time to talk about problems. It would be a serious mistake to complain during a nice champagne reception at an exhibition opening, as the next time, the mayor would avoid meeting the person with the problems from the library again. People want positive memories of the evening and to hear about the library's successes, with the event a chance to make contacts with decision-makers in preparation for a face-to-face meeting to discuss any problems. Of course, a public event is not the place to tell the mayor about problems in front of the public. Things need to be clearly described, with alternatives, possible solutions and a positive idea that can be communicated through the administrative process or at another meeting.

A good way to fail in advocacy is to tell too much, to reveal all the details. Librarians, museum people and cultural people in general want to tell everything, but politicians want to hear just one message, like an elevator speech. It is very important to get all the points of ten sentences into one sentence, but you cannot make a message short if you have not done the analysis properly. Only a good analysis leads the advocate to good, short and clear arguments (Haavisto 2022).

Some people think that if they produce a well-written letter with their claims and developed arguments and put it on their website, people will listen. However, they may not even know about the website. And some people turn up at a meeting like WIPO and make a scientific statement and think they will win the argument, but nothing happens. It is important to be humble; successful advocacy is not based on the pure quality of the argument or just having a nice argument, as most decision-makers want to feel that they are doing the right thing, highlighting the importance of effectively engaging in the process. There are three possible outcomes: either the politicians come down on the side of libraries, they come down on the other side or they disengage completely. If you cannot build up the idea that it is bad for libraries to be harmed by copyright without exception, and that the politician has a responsibility to act and to feel a gentle sense of support, then it can go wrong (Wyber 2022).

The role of library staff is often overlooked. Advocacy for the institution can only be successful if staff identify with their library and do not complain in public. Complaints must therefore be heard and resolved internally, so that library management and staff can present a united front. Staff who repeatedly complain about the lack of recognition of the library profession should look at how they talk about their library and the image they project.

16.4 Other Difficulties in Library Advocacy

For Li, people from other areas might ask: do we still need libraries? Librarians need to solve this problem and then think about how to advocate for themselves. With the impact of the digital age, people's understanding of the library is still stuck in its original form and function. The demands on libraries are changing, however, most libraries lack the capacity for new knowledge services and professional knowledge organisation. In the new age, society needs a new understanding and trust in libraries, and there are new demands on the library with its own characteristics. This comes from the library's self-development, self-transformation and integral, fundamental professional improvement. "We believe what we do is the most important. If the work is unsuccessful, the advocacy cannot be successful, and it does not even matter to advocate or not" (Li 2022).

Nicholson (2022) recognises difficulties for libraries in the lack of external understanding of the scope and complexity of the library and information sector. She also sees some gender issues; as the library profession is often a feminised profession but advocates in a male-dominated environment, there are some difficulties in advocacy. Another point is the lack of advocacy skills available to expand advocacy internationally, regionally and nationally. She sometimes sees the need for advocacy within the library sector about the need for advocacy.

Hapel sees a downside to libraries: everyone loves them, but politicians do not think they are particularly important. Libraries have this very strange situation of their image: either they are seen as a relic from the old days, with dusty books, or they are seen as something that is extremely difficult to get to grips with. Because a modern library has so many facets, politicians ask if the library in Aarhus wants to do everything. It is therefore difficult to find the identity of a modern library, where reading and lending physical books is no longer the main task, which must be made clear through advocacy. The generation that saw dusty and boring libraries in their youth is now the politicians and decision-makers, and it is very difficult to convince them of the new form and services of a library, which is why the Aarhus libraries, even though they were so successful with a new main library, had advocated for a branch library and were never able to get it. As it is always possible to get into trouble with a project, a library leader must always have several good projects and stop advocating for the one that is not working at the moment but might be successful in ten years' time. It is not always the advocacy that is wrong; there can be many different reasons for difficulties at the moment (Hapel 2022).

Tise has noted a stagnation in the results of copyright and open access advocacy, which is particularly true in countries like South Africa. The Library Association, libraries and universities are trying to advocate for fair copyright, which is

necessary for education, but the necessary copyright law in South Africa is several years behind schedule, with other stakeholders such as publishers, authors and trade having influenced this decision. There should be a consensus in Africa to support education and to have a balanced copyright law, and IFLA advocates at WIPO and has been successful for people with reading disabilities, but not for exceptions for libraries. Internationally there are changes, but at the country level each region and each country remain isolated (Tise 2022).

Begum shared a story from Malaysia, where the library association has been advocating for school libraries. When the IFLA School Library Guidelines came out, IFLA presented it to the government hoping for better development of school libraries in the country, with arguments such as that we cannot say that we want to be a developed country and not feed the minds of the young generation and provide them with books to read. A lady in the Education Department who oversaw school libraries decided that instead of using this IFLA document, she would prepare a Malaysian manual for school resource centres, to have a proper manual which every school had to use to set up a school resource centre. The library association worked with her and in the end she produced a good document, but then she left to go to another job in the Ministry of Education. When the next person came in, her priorities were different; despite the advocacy of the library association, the document was printed, but it was not made compulsory for schools, and it was only good for the ministry's website (Begum 2022).

Sometimes advocacy can come too early, and it should come at the right time. After a conversation with a colleague, Wyber believes that when IFLA was already advocating for the SDGs in libraries in 2016 and 2017, it was not the right time; indeed, it took a couple of years for the process of the SDGs to work its way down from the UN level to national governments. Actually, financial governance understands and has embraced them, but the philosophy behind it is to do things in an integrated way by involving more stakeholders. It is only in the last two or three years that it has reached national governments. "Getting librarians really excited and engaged in the SDGs in 2017, that was probably a little bit too early, therefore the chances to succeed was low at that point" (Wyber 2022).

16.5 Advocating Pitfalls Summary

All respondents reported making mistakes in advocacy, with the most common reasons given that they had misjudged something or someone and that some politicians say they will take care of concerning issues, which never happens. Mistakes are part of advocacy. You could say that if you do not make mistakes, nothing will be done but in advocacy all pitfalls are a message to learn from the

mistake. The joy and fun of library advocacy makes up for the moment when everything goes wrong and something just does not work. It is, in essence, a selfless task that brings many personal benefits in terms of knowledge of human nature and partnership. In addition, internal advocacy is needed to develop libraries and convince librarians and information professionals of the need to advocate to correct the image of modern libraries in society.