Public libraries in Algeria: current situation and future challenges

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Abstract

Currently there are some of 1100 public libraries in Algeria affiliated to four government departments: culture, local affairs, youth and religious affairs. The oldest one which is the national library was created on 1835. However, we establish that these libraries aren’t a social space yet. A lack of Reading as a social practice and habit especially among young people. This problem is increasing after an emergence of cybercafés since 2005 (more than 5000). In order to understand this phenomenon we did a set of surveys (within a PhD research) from 2007 to 2010. We tried to understand behaviors of people when it’s a question of libraries (with comparison with cybercafés): who go to libraries, when and why they move to libraries? And what they did exactly there? And how they assess offered services? And what’s about government publications? These surveys concerned some of 1475 citizens. As a result of the study we find out that public libraries are more frequented by pupils and students especially (60% girls- 40% boys) in opposite of cybercafés (70 % boys and 30% for girls). Libraries are used particularly for preparing exams and not for reading books (especially in north cities). As reasons behind these issues local libraries are far from UNESCO-IFLA guidelines and recommendations. However we found two libraries in the capital Algiers which may serve as a model comparing to these international guidelines. We deduced that there is no strategy plan for these libraries (both in national and local levels). As a main challenge in a future we consider that public libraries must recover their social position as a true social space to acquire information and culture habits. This may be done through a combination of three strategies: renew a library management methods, investing ICTs, and offering a relevant content.