

## INTERVIEW

with *Mr. Klaus-Peter Böttger*,

EBLIDA President,

President, Federal Union of German Library and Information Associations

to *Eva Semertzaki*, editor *Synergasia*

For a first time the annual EBLIDA-NAPLE Conference was held in Athens at the Technological Educational Institute, Egaleo, Attica on 14 May 2014. The topic of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference was *Libraries in transition: Changes? Crisis? Chances!* The Conference was under the auspices of EBLIDA but was successfully organized by the Association of Greek Librarians and Information Scientists (EEBEP). [EBLIDA](#) stands for the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations and [NAPLE](#) stands for the National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe.

Before the Conference several closed meetings of the EBLIDA groups took place in Athens. During the meeting on Government Information and Libraries, Mr. Giorgos Glossiotis, President of EEBEP, introduced me to Mr. Klaus-Peter Böttger, the President of EBLIDA to arrange an interview for the *Synergasia* journal. The idea of having an interview with Mr. Klaus-Peter Böttger was coined to Mrs. Gabriel Sander, the new Head of the Goethe Institute Library. Finally, the interview made feasible in writing.

*ES. Mr. Böttger, as the EBLIDA President you are the most appropriate person to request information about EBLIDA, its goals and mission, its activities and synergies with other libraries and organizations which deal with libraries.*

**K-P B.** EBLIDA is the umbrella Organisation of Library associations in Europe and the voice of Library lobbying in Europe with a special view on the European Parliament and the European Commission. The basic principle is to promote unhindered access to information for everyone through libraries. And that means there are a lot of working fields: copyright and licensing in the digital age, culture and the information society, education and lifelong learning. Of course we are not the only

library lobbying organisation but we work together and network with other organisations such as [IFLA](#) on the world level or [LIBER](#) with the more intensive aspect on research.

*ES. Obviously, being the EBLIDA President you are involved in lobbying for libraries in terms of the European Union and other authorities. What is the current perception of those authorities towards libraries? We have recently heard of the EU blocking the discussion of copyright laws to aid libraries and archives fulfill their missions in the digital environment.*

**K-P B.** I was very angry and disappointed when I heard about the behaviour of the EU during the WIPO negotiations. There were some old-fashioned pictures of libraries evident that have nothing to do with today's world and today's libraries. It is absurd when it is said that libraries should only lend books and printed material. This has nothing to do with the expectations of patrons and it restricts the access to information.

*ES. There is much ink poured on e-books, e-lending and the related topics. What is the position of EBLIDA to the denial of several publishers to lend or sell e-books to libraries and what related actions have been taken?*

**K-P B.** During the last decades there has been a good relationship between publishers and libraries. And this is seriously disturbed at the moment. Libraries and EBLIDA of course demand that the regulations of the printed material, to buy any objects to lend it, to manage them in the limits of copyright, are also valid for intangible objects. We want to provide our library users with the latest e-books as we do with printed books. We want to buy e-books at fair prices and on reasonable terms. That's why we want a clear copyright law that enables libraries to fulfil their enduring mission into the 21st century of providing all EU citizens with access to information, free and unhindered.

*ES. What are the benefits for a library or a staff member to join international or national library-related corporate bodies, such as EBLIDA or IFLA?*

**K-P B.** Most of the national laws - some say up to 90% - are made in Brussels, at least the framework of the national laws is built there. So if anything goes wrong in the first step you can't improve it basically at the second step in the transfer to the national level anymore. You have to get into the act just at the beginning. So it is not possible for all the 65.000 libraries in Europe to do this. That's why the libraries need EBLIDA as a lobby organisation in Brussels.

*ES. What is your experience from participating in committees, associations and other networks related to libraries?*

**K-P B.** I am very thankful that I am allowed to work in international boards and committees. It is a wonderful experience to work together, to compare notes with someone, to understand each other, to share experiences, to develop and create ideas. That's a wonderful cooperation although it does not run always that fast as you are used from home or your own language but it strengthens the common ground.

*ES. Libraries are in a transition phase. Many of them face the danger of closure, others of budget cuttings and staff shortage. Though, libraries have to stop mourning of what they lost in the past but to face the present and shape the future. What is or should be the focus of libraries in the changing world?*

**K-P B.** I think that libraries have to emphasize on the role of the democratic access to information, from leisure to research, from education to lifelong learning. Imagine a world of libraries! Is all information on the Web? Are they true, are they free? Do you find the relevant information you were looking for? And not to forget the library as a building, as a place, as a meeting place, a place to learn, a place to meet, a place of cultural heritage, a place of text, data mining and research. I guess it is overestimated that a search engine could replace the large world of libraries.

*ES. "Those that want to stay have to change" was a wise quotation I jotted down from your speech during the EBLIDA conference in Athens. Could you please elaborate on this clever phrase?*

**K-P B.** The libraries have to change, they are in permanent transition, and as HRH Laurentien said in her keynote speech this has no end. And that applies also to librarians. If you don't develop further you can't survive. When I remember what I learned at the University, with this knowledge I would not get a job today. If an institution wants to survive and play its role in the society of education and culture it has to re-invent yourself all the time. Without change there is no chance for the future.

*ES. Libraries have a serious and strong competitor, which is Google. People conceive that they find everything they search on the Internet. However, you can find a thousand answers on the Internet but you can find the right answer only in the library. How can libraries survive from the unequal competition as well as how can they change the attitude of people and persuade them to use libraries?*

**K-P B.** I think that we can't win this competition although I am convinced that a librarian is a better search engine. And this is our chance. Because we can connect the information available on the net with the information in the library. And librarians can assess how the priorities of the search results are set. This better result will certainly be higher estimated by patrons than a mass of results and information that they cannot manage.

*ES. The affluence of information overwhelms and penetrates our lives and the tremendous volume of data created on the Internet everyday might threaten individual privacy. How safe is a user today from the daily exposure to the social media and how can libraries react to that trend?*

**K-P B.** I think the advantage of a library should be the reliability of a public institution. Libraries are aware of the fact that the data of their readers and their lendings would be very interesting for companies, especially at the moment in the e-book-sector, but our patrons can have confidence in the data protection policy of libraries.

*ES. Besides of being the EBLIDA President you are the Director of the Public Library in Essen. How easy or difficult is it to combine work with the tasks and responsibilities*

*entailed in the position of the President? Do you get support from the parent institution which is the City of Essen and what do you suggest to people who desire to get involved in similar bodies?*

**K-P B.** I have to confess that it is not easy to combine these two jobs although the EBLIDA-Job is an honorary office but I have a wonderful team staff of director, office assistant and communication officer in The Hague. That makes it much easier for me. To convince someone to take such an office I would tell him/her of the following advantages: you build up and become part of a wonderful international network of colleagues and often make friends. You are confronted with the latest information and you are always well informed, can try to influence in favour of libraries. And besides work you have a lot of fun. From my municipality and colleagues I have emotional support.

*ES. As the Director of the Public Library in Essen would you please describe the status of public libraries in Germany?*

**K-P B.** The status of public libraries in Germany is very multifaceted. There are some regions where the big cities are growing, some regions are diminishing connected with a lot of financial problems, budget cuts and closure of branches. And we have failed with the attempt to pass a bill so that the existence of libraries are legally secured. BUT we had a lot of national successful projects, e.g. a German variation of the bookstart, promoting literacy and reading skills. There have been new attractive buildings been built, for instance in Stuttgart, Bielefeld, Mülheim and there are plans for Dresden, Duisburg, just to name a few. And many libraries had the opportunity to improve their interior design to emphasize the library as a place of learning and education.

*ES. Libraries in Greece confront the consequences of the socio-economic downturn. They have to reconsider services and resources both human and financial. What do you advise the Greek librarians to do during the transition period?*

**K-P B.** The libraries have to show and make evident how important they are for a democratic future of the society, how valuable they are for the education of a society, how inalienable they are for a further development. Because the biggest

danger of a society is ignorance, libraries have to secure the free access to information.

*ES. Finally, how do you foresee the future of libraries?*

**K-P B.** I can't foresee the future. As Einstein said: prognoses are very difficult especially concerning the future. But I am convinced that in 20 or 30 years there will be libraries, perhaps looking a little bit different than today, with different conceptions than today but satisfying the need of information of the citizens.

*ES. I would like to thank you very much for allocating time to reply to my questions. Your thoughts, experiences and advices will be significant for the readers of Synergasia, the online journal of the Committee for the Support of Libraries.*