

Libraries transforming communities: the case study of Toddlers' library of Municipality of Athens"

Ava Chalkiadaki, Evgenia Vassilakaki

ABSTRACT

The argument that libraries transform local communities is not new. On the contrary, a lot has been written for the past few years by well-known and prestigious organizations on the subject in an effort to provide guidelines and know-how (ALA, 2017; IFLA, 2017). This paper aims to present the Toddlers' library of Municipality of Athens. Specifically, it aims to report on the partnerships among local authorities and non profit organizations to solve organizational and functional challenges; the strategic plan formulated to create the first toddlers' library in Greece; the collaboration between the public and private sector that led to collection development in various languages and thus services offered; and the way local community responded to this challenge. Information Professional Organizations such as IFLA and ALA have developed guidelines and provided a series of free webinars for stakeholders to assist towards this direction (ALA, 2017; IFLA, 2017). In addition, projects like Libraries Transforming Communities were funded (Brewer, 2015) whereas conferences were organized to inform librarians on how to succeed local engagement. However, successful examples are still a few. Toddlers' library of Municipality of Athens addressed the information needs of a very new targeted audience, not only in Greece but also world-wide that of infants with their parents. Library's acceptance was so overwhelming for the past two years since it was inaugurated in 2016 that led to opening of a children's library with a designated area for toddlers in June 2017 in another district of the Municipality of Athens. This paper contributes to providing an insight into the challenges that this endeavor phased and the lessons learned from conceiving the vision throughout the implementation circle. In addition, it sheds light on how toddlers' library served as a mean to turn an abandoned park in the city centre of Athens into a meeting place for local community for joint open activities.