

# Public libraries and newcomers

## Rafiq and Issam

Stijn Callewaert

OBiB – Brussels Public Library Network

Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie Brussels



# Brussels network of public libraries

- 20 Flemish libraries
- Working in a superdivers context
- Integrated network
- Shared vision/common outreaching projects
- OBiB: the support platform for the libraries (IT + education)



# Rafiq en Issam

## Diversity of the city!

- 1.191.604 inhabitants (2017)
- 34,8% foreign nationality
  - 23,1% EU
  - 11,7% non EU
- 179 different nationalities (2017)
- Approx. 30% of school children speak other languages than French/Dutch at home (2014)

***Super-diversity***

## Diversity in the library?

- 40.906 customers (children/adults) in Flemish libraries = 3,4% (2017)
- Approx. 150 different nationalities, but only 2276 non EU customers = 5,6% (2017)
- 11,8% of books in other languages than Dutch
- Hardly any newcomers in library staff, library councils, among volunteers...

***A long way to go...***

# What is in the word “public”?

- “Being there”
- Organization/service-based
- Intra muros
- For the happy few
- “The library is open all week long; people just need to find us and to make use of our services”
- “How can people find us?”
- Customer-based
- Extra muros: outreaching
- For all. A human rights’ approach: the library as a fundamental right (access to information, knowledge, leisure, culture...).
- Libraries need to step towards their potential users. Towards newcomers in particular

# What is the role the public library can play for/with Rafiq and Issam?



Examples from the Brussels public libraries network

# Boekstart

The libraries try to convince young parents to read to their baby. The central message is clear: "It is never too early to start reading to your child".

- The Brussels libraries all have Bookstart collections (carton, plastic books...)
- Book gift at the age of 6 and 15 months
- Libraries are present in all Brussels Family Centers
- Close collaboration with kindergartens
- Special training for library staff (language development, story telling, communication skills...)



# Boekenbende

The libraries try to motivate families to read to their children by sending out readers/ reading ambassadors to families.

- Volunteers/students go reading at home for at least 5 subsequent weeks (1 hour /week)
- Newcoming families are the target group of this project
- Special attention for home languages
- At least one visit to the nearest by public library
- Intensive partner project in which libraries, primary schools and institutions of higher education are closely working together
- Each year at least 250 families take part in the project
- Unique project that started 21 years ago in Brussels



# Brussels Reads Aloud

Through multilingual storytelling, the libraries try to give more space to the home languages spoken in Brussels.

- Multilingual reading aloud sessions: Dutch in combination with one or more other languages
- Storytellers from different language communities
- Traditional stories from the various communities
- Collaboration with various external partners (e.g. Foyer)
- Brussels Reads Aloud festival once a year





# Arabic collection

The libraries try to set up a high quality collection in different languages. Special focus on newcomers.

An Arabic collection is the first result of a new approach.

- Participation and dialogue: customer based approach through a resonance group
- October 2017: 400 titles in 3 libraries
- Particular attention to promotion and communication throughout the Brussels library network
- Special activity program around the collection (e.g. Brussels Reads Aloud)

Similar approach for other newcomers' languages and communities in Brussels: Russian, Romanian, Spanish, Portugese, Bulgarian...



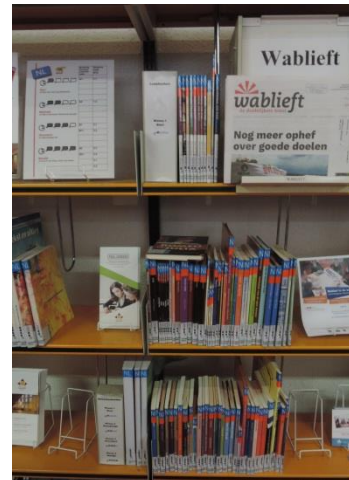
# Language courses

How to learn Dutch/other languages? The libraries offer a special collection of language courses:

- High quality offer
- Advice by trained staff
- Easy level label system
- Special attention to newcomers: easy readings combined with the Daisy book, different instruction languages, Dutch Daisy versions of books people have already read in their mother tongue
- Close collaboration with the main reference organizations for Dutch language learning (Huis van het Nederlands, Brusselleer, Luisterpunt)

Libraries also organize activities with/for Dutch language learners:

- Conversation tables
- Guided introductions in the library



# Introduction visits

The libraries welcome on a regular basis groups for an introductory visit to the library.

- Focus on newcomers
- Interactive approach (e.g. “Meet the author”)
- Library visit often prepared in the class before
- Close collaboration with external partners who work with newcomers (Huis van het Nederlands, BON, Brusselleer, CVO)
- Introductory visit in Dutch or in other languages
- Focus on what the library can offer:
  - Books in different languages
  - Internet
  - Library as a meeting place
  - Children’s collection/activities
  - ...
- Main message: feel welcome in *your* library



# Welcoming Rafiq and Issam

There is much more we could do for Rafiq and Issam

- More outreaching work: go the places where our public comes/lives (higher presence in schools, family centers, preschool organizations...; home visits)
- More attention to the social function of the library: space for meeting and discussion, free coffee, newspapers and magazines...
- More shared ownership of the library: invite newcomers to organize activities in our libraries, to actively intervene in the acquisition policy of the library
- More attention to communication with/for newcomers

# Question? More information?

- [www.brusselsebibliotheken.be](http://www.brusselsebibliotheken.be)
- [www.boekenbende.be](http://www.boekenbende.be)
- Stijn Callewaert  
*Reading Promotion and Diversity*  
**OBiB – Ondersteuning Bibliotheken in Brussel**  
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