

Calimera Country Report

**Cultural Applications:
Local Institutions Mediating Electronic Resources**

Belgium

Information on Public Libraries,
Local Museums and Archives



calimera

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Table of Contents

	Page No.
ORGANISATION	2
POLICIES AND STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	4
STATISTICS	10
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS	13
OUTLOOK	15
KEY STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES	16
JOINT ACTIVITIES INVOLVING PUBLIC LIBRARIES, MUSEUMS AND ARCHIVES	16
RESEARCH	16

Organisation

[Back to Contents](#)

Introduction

Belgium is a federal country, with a complex administrative structure. It comprises of 3 regions and three language communities. The regions are: Flanders, the Walloon region and Brussels (the capital region). The language communities are: the Dutch speaking community (Flanders + 30% of the Brussels population); the French speaking community (Walloon + 70% of the Brussels region) and the German speaking community (which is part of the Walloon region).

Numbers of inhabitants:

- Dutchspeaking: 6.350.000 (Flanders 6.016.000 + 30% of the Brussels Region)
- Frenchspeaking: 4.050.000 (Walloon 3.380.500 + 70% of the Brussels Region)

Culture in general is the responsibility of the language communities, which means that policies apply over the two Regions where the languages are represented.

Consequently, all the following sections of the Belgian country profile will comprise of two parts: one for the Dutchspeaking Community and a second one for the French speaking community.

Belgium consists of 10 provinces: five in Flanders and 5 in the Walloon region. Brussels is not part of any province.

There are over 500 local authorities, ranging from small villages with only a couple of hundred inhabitants to metropolitan areas such as Antwerp and Liège with nearly half a million citizens. The average size of a local authority is between 10.000 and 15.000 inhabitants.

Public Libraries - Dutch Speaking

Organising a public library service is the responsibility of the local authorities; this is imposed on them by decree. Although public library work is substantially funded by the Flemish Government (for about 35% of total costs), local authorities bear most of the costs.

Public library policies are a part of the culture department. As a result of this, both language communities have their own public library legislation. And their public library system is evolving differently.

The provincial authorities also have certain responsibilities for the public libraries in their territory, especially in the field of networking; this is imposed on them by the library act (see below).

Museums - Dutch Speaking

In Flanders, the preservation of monuments and environment and the preservation of the tangible archaeological patrimony do not belong to the cultural matter constitutionally, although they are part of the international collective term 'cultural heritage'. The care for the *monumental heritage* is a matter for the Regions, whilst the Communities are competent for the *movable and intangible heritage* ('cultural heritage').

Actors

The main actors in the field are:

- the different authorities (the Council of Europe, the European Union, the federal government, the Flemish government, the French-speaking Community, the provinces, local administrations, the Association of Flemish Towns and Communes (VVSG), the Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP), the Flemish Community Commission (VGC));
- authorized and unauthorized museums;
- organisations/ associations dealing with popular culture;
- archive organizations, preservation libraries and documentation centres;
- other heritage institutions and organisations;
- focal points: Cultural Biography of Flanders vzw and the Flemish Centre of Popular Culture vzw;
- lobbies (the Flemish Museum Association (VMV), Flemish Association of Libraries, Archives and Documentation (VVBAD));
- advisory commissions;
- study centres, colleges of higher education;
- artists, galleries, auction houses, collectors;
- restorers, conservation workers;
- the federal and Flemish scientific institutions;
- the media;
- supporting organisations (e.g. the King Baudoin Foundation);
- international partners (e.g. Unesco).

Characteristics of the cultural heritage field

Typical of the cultural heritage field in Flanders is its rich offer, the result of a long and rich past.

In comparison to our neighbouring countries, the care for our cultural heritage has seriously fallen behind as far as preservation and management (e.g. inventories) and scientific research are concerned.

The knowledge about the cultural heritage, which is not stored in institutions (private collections and dispersed cultural heritage), is not very extended.

Although over the last few years the Flemish authorities have released more funds to elaborate a cultural heritage policy, there still is a budgetary underestimation of what our cultural heritage holds on offer.

The cultural heritage field is extremely fragmented and not manned with enough professionals.

Equally typical is the enthusiasm of many people who are active within the field of the cultural heritage.

Policies and Strategic Activities

[Back to Contents](#)

Agencies

The perpetual evolution within the cultural field has strengthened the need for autonomous structures, so that the policy as well as the developments within that field may be supported, analysed and guided in a critical manner.

It is important for the authorities to maintain contact with the cultural field, to know what is going on, which are the needs and requirements. The authorities to sound out their own policies and check which steps are efficient and which aren't. For this purpose, the authorities need antennae in the field, feelers that are on the field, but do not belong to it, focus points which can keep distance to be able to observe matters in a relatively autonomous, but critical way.

The agencies support the cultural field and inform on the government's policy. In this way, they translate the government's policy into their own language and will offer help of all kinds.

- An agency offers active service to all actors in the field in order to stimulate professionalism in audience building and participation, quality care, information, documentation and filing.
- With the view on the continuous development of the own work domain, an agency contributes to developing a vision and an evaluation, and it incites applied research. It puts information and data at the disposal of the government and of the actors in the field.

An agency organises and coordinates activities and initiatives which promote the know-how on the sector and the museum offer in Flanders and abroad, and which contribute to a wider and a more profound cultural participation.

Public Libraries - Dutch Speaking

a. Library Act

The first library legislation dates back to 1921.
A modern library act was voted in 1978.

Since 1st January 2002 a third library legislation came into force. The library legislation is now part of an umbrella legislation –the Local Cultural Policy Decree- regulating the local cultural policies. Main features of the library chapter of this legislation are:

- Local authorities are obliged to organize a public library
- Local authorities have to submit a policy plan covering a 6-year period, yearly action plans and activity reports over the previous year
- Public libraries obligatory have to co-operate with the Flemish agency for public libraries and on a regional level (SBB)

b. Mission

Public libraries are assigned a fivefold mission, to be achieved with a matrix of assets and functions:

	Mission	Based On	Function
1.	culture	Recreative material	loans
2.	knowledge	Informational material	study
3.	education	Course material	activities
4.	heritage	Historic material	exhibitions
5.	social	Infrastructure	meeting places

c. Funding

- Local authorities meeting these three obligations receive a substantial annual grant from the Flemish government, covering the most significant part of the staff salaries
- The provincial authorities are obliged to develop services to support local public libraries; there is no direct funding from the provinces to the local level
- The Flemish government funds both a national support agency (VCOB = Flemish Centre for Public Libraries) and a professional association (VVBAD = Flemish Association of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists)
- Borrowing of books and the use of internet have to be provided free of charge; youngsters below 18 years old must register free of charge

d. Agency

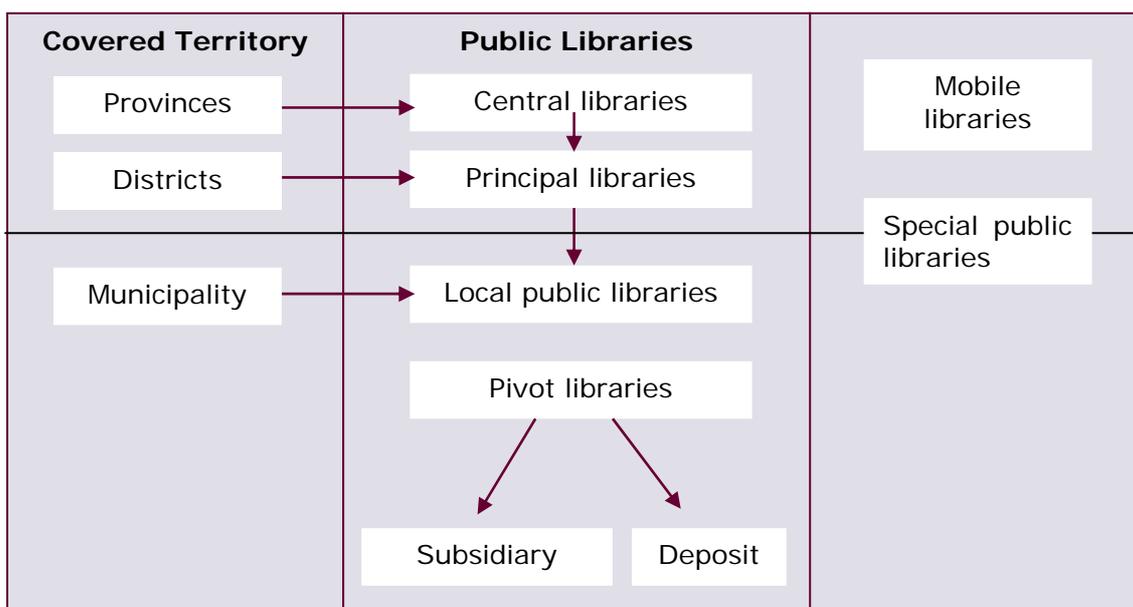
A strategic element of the public library policy is the national support agency VCOB. The agency was established in 2000 with a fourfold assignment:

- to further develop the BIBNET-project (see below)
- to maintain the union catalogue VLACC (see below)
- to foster professionalisation of the individual public libraries
- to organise national campaigns promoting library use

Public Libraries - French Speaking

Public library work is organised in a pyramidal structure

- local public libraries working for one or more local authorities, constituting local networks of public reading institutions (réseaux locaux de lecture publique)
- mobile library services serving local authorities without a public library
- special public libraries, serving the visually handicapped, hospital patients or prisoners
- principal and central libraries co-ordinate and support the three previous library types.



All libraries mentioned are subsidized by the Frenchspeaking Community according to the prevailing library act (28/02/1978 and 14/03/1995). Local authorities contribute largely in the operational costs of their libraries.

Refer to :

<http://www.cdadoc.cfwb.be/RechDoc/docForm.asp?docid=2065&docname=19780228s00846>

<http://www.cdadoc.cfwb.be/RechDoc/docForm.asp?docid=2428&docname=19950314s20053>

The Walloon policy has a double focus:

- to modernize the management of public libraries, and provide adequate funding
- to professionalize staff, and provide continuing education

At the same time, a number common supportive instruments and tools are under development, particularly in the field of information and communication technology: union catalogues, abstracting periodicals, shared bibliographic research in the virtual library and referencing websites. On a European level there is co-operation regarding the development of thesauri like RAMEAU, for which a co-operation with France has been established.

Special attention is paid to the so-called non-publics, those who hardly read or don't read at all. A series of activities and partnerships are set up: marketing reading, intensified co-operation with schools and with educational institutions concerned with illiteracy.

Finally, modernization and renovation of library buildings remains a priority.

Museums - Dutch Speaking

The Unesco Convention of November 14th, 1970 was ratified by Belgium on May, 13th 2003, resulting in a list been drawn up of the 'Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity'.

For movable and intangible heritage, the Flemish government has recently developed a new policy. The museum decree of 1996 was a big step forward. Yet, its implementation revealed numerous problems within the broad scope of cultural heritage (archives, preservation libraries, documentation centres). The hardly known collections in churches, monasteries, beguinages, town halls or associations dealing with local customs and folklore were also left unconsidered.

The present Flemish government supports this cultural heritage to develop into a full policy domain. The new policy seeks to visualise heritage to a wide as possible audience, in order to make the current meaning of this heritage accessible to the community. Heritage requires a bigger social relevance in the community.

Heritage policy should be integrated: not only conservation, but also disclosure to the public and proper management should be part of it.

a. Museum Decree

The decree on the recognition and subsidizing of museums (1996) lays down rules for the recognition of museums and the organisation of the museum scope, and it stipulates the manner in which the working of the museums will be financially stimulated and supported.

The recognition of museums is all about meeting minimum standards and basic functions: a museum being a "non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits..... (...)" (ICOM).

Among other conditions, a few are that the museum should dispose of a worthy collection, have a dynamic contact with the public, and that it should be open to the public at fixed times, spread throughout the year. The deontological rules of the museum profession also need to be respected.

The decree anticipates the granting of working subsidies for a core of personnel and for the museum working in general – a lump sum that depends on the budget of the Flemish Community.

Moreover, all recognized museums may apply for subsidies around certain projects. The decree also anticipates project subsidies for initiatives coming from third parties or from a museum, which will benefit a larger scope of museums. Thanks to the system of policy priorities, subsidies can be geared to where extra stimuli are needed.

Starting subsidies can be applied for in the case of new museological initiatives.

In order to further professionalize the sector, the Flemish and provincial administrations recruited museum advisers after the Museum decree had been introduced. Their mission consists in advising museums, giving training, project initiation and counselling and negotiations with all parties concerned.

Although the financial means of the museums increased only gradually, the introduction of the Museum decree has clearly had a positive impact. At this moment, 43 museums have been recognized.

b. Decree on Popular Culture

In the decree on the recognition and subsidizing of organisations for popular culture and the creation of a Flemish Centre for Popular Culture or Ethnology, the option was taken that only one association with a national character would be recognized per traditional field of the popular culture (genealogy, local history, folklore in general, industrial archaeology, ...). The decree also plans the creation and the operation of a point of support, the Flemish Centre for Popular Culture.

c. Archives Decree

In the new Archives decree of 19th July 2002 on the cultural archive working under private law, the archive and documentations centres based on social-philosophical movements, the archive and documentation centres subsidized on the basis of cultural themes and the projects for private archives received a (renewed) decretal status.

The decree also enables the structural subsidizing of cultural theme-archives of national importance (e.g. literary heritage, musical heritage, architectural heritage, ecclesiastical heritage, ...) that have a different line of approach than the social-philosophical one. In order to avoid proliferation and to stimulate coordination, the Flemish Government can only subsidize one archive and documentation centre per theme and per term of office.

The Archive decree also anticipates the creation of a new point of support for the working of archives. This point of support has been integrated in the non-profit institution Cultural Biography Flanders (explained further on).

d. Decree on the Protection of the Movable Cultural Heritage of Exceptional Importance

The first priority was given to procuring an adequate legal framework. The 'top pieces decree' wishes to offer this legal framework to all cultural items that should be preserved because of their exceptional significance for the Flemish Community. The decree was proclaimed by the Flemish Government on January 24th 2003.

The fact that there are exceptional pieces out of Flanders' cultural heritage to be seen in prominent international museums, is considered as being a positive particular. At the same time, it is equally important that a part of this heritage should also be continuously be admired and studied within Flanders itself.

e. Decree on Maritime Heritage

The decree of March 29th 2002 on the protection of the maritime heritage should enable the Flemish Community to elaborate an adequate management of the maritime monuments via protection and preservation of this exceptional and attractive heritage.

f. Cultural Heritage Agreement/Covenant

In order to offer more scope to local heritage policy, the Flemish government has brought about a 'cultural heritage covenant'.

It is an agreement between the Flemish Community and the cities, aiming to disclose, to manage and to preserve the local heritage. Cities have always been the treasure chambers of our cultural heritage and have a natural relationship between the inhabitants and their (cultural-historical) environment.

The 'cultural heritage covenant' entails collaboration conceived as an agreement enabling local government to engage in heritage policy itself.

Since the year 2000, covenants were agreed with the cities of Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges. In 2002 the same happened with Leuven, Mechelen and Tongeren and in 2003, with Brussels.

In every city a project group, a 'Heritage Unit', has been founded. This group is the driving force behind the development of an integrated local heritage policy. Every city is developing its own approach.

g. Draft of Heritage Decree

Recently the start was given to a draft of decree on the organisation and subsidizing of a cultural heritage policy, the 'Heritage decree'. With this decree, the Flemish authorities wish to stimulate the qualitative and enduring care for and the disclosure / exploitation of the cultural heritage. The draft of decree anticipates:

- the recognition and subsidizing of museums (integration of the Museum decree in the Heritage decree);
- the granting of subsidies for the realization of the heritage covenants;
- subsidizing publications on cultural heritage;
- the subsidizing of projects around cultural heritage: cultural-historical exhibitions, projects which focus on the development of cultural heritage, international projects;
- de-subsidizing of the supporting point for museums, the archive centres, the preservation libraries, the documentation centres and the working of the heritage covenants.
- The Museum decree of 1996 will be fully integrated in the Heritage decree.

h. Agencies

For the policy domain Cultural Heritage there are two agencies, that have the legal structure of a non-profit organization:

- the Cultural Biography Flanders (the agency for museums, archive centres, preservation libraries, documentation centres for the working of the heritage covenants)
- the Flemish Centre of Popular Culture.

i. Cultural Heritage weekend

It is important for the public to participate in the cultural heritage. Actions with the purpose of sensitization are therefore being organised. During the annual Open Monuments' Day in September, the public gets the opportunity to visit several monuments and valuable buildings (the tangible heritage), free of charge. In spring, there is a similar initiative for the movable and intangible heritage, namely the Cultural Heritage weekend (from 2004 onward: Cultural Heritage day).

The Cultural Heritage weekend of 2003 was a huge success. 450 locations in Flanders and Brussels received more than 250.000 visitors who came to admire libraries, archives and museums.

Statistics

[Back to Contents](#)

Public Libraries - Dutch Speaking (as per 1.1.2001)

	Number of Authorities	Number of Public Libraries	
Flanders	308	297	
Brussels	19	9*	
Total	327	306**	880

*Public libraries for the Dutch speaking inhabitants

**One third of public libraries have more than 30 opening hours a week

Stock & Loans

Category	Numbers	
Printed		
Youth	6.951.231	
Adults – fiction	6.635.332	
Adults – non fiction	6.489.974	
Adults – reference	1.165.268	
Total Printed	21.241.805	45.557.970

Category	Numbers	
Audio-Visual Materials		
CD	1.578.242	
CD ROM	94.315	
DVD	8.227	
video	150.488	
Total Audio-Visual	1.831.272	6.608.915
Grand Total	23.073.077	52.166.885

Members

Population	Members	
- 14 years old	537.831	
Adults	1.120.344	
Total	1.658.175	

Expenditure (In M Euro)

Category	Amounts	Mainly paid by...
Staff		
Library staff	1.820	Flemish government (85%)
Administrative staff	845	Provincial authority (60%)
OPERATIONAL		
stock	780	Local authority
Other	805	Local authority
INFRASTRUCTURE		
Hardware	350	Local authority
Buildings	640	Local authority
Grand Total	5.344	

Public Libraries - French Speaking

	Number of Authorities	Number of Public Libraries
Walloon	262	498
Brussels	19	52*
Total	281	550

*Public libraries for the French speaking inhabitants

Type	Number	Units
Local libraries	139	520
Mobile libraries	9	9
Special libraries	4	4
Principal libraries	17	17
Central libraries	6	6

Number of library users: 790.000

Budget 2003 of the Frenchspeaking Community: euro 11.271.000 (Added to this amount the budgets provided locally.)

Stock & Loans		
Category	Numbers	Loans
PRINTED		
Youth	4.059.042	
Adults - fiction	3.818.547	
Adults - non fiction + references	5.699.085	
Total Printed	13.576.674	17.177.918

Audio-visual Materials

The public libraries have only few audio-visual material's. Their numbers are not significant of what is available in Frenchspeaking Community because "La médiathèque de la Communauté française de Belgique" possesses the monopoly on audio-visual materials. It is it that supplies these supports.

Population	Members	Percentage
-14 years old	394.210	
Adults	424.473	
Total	818.683	

Expenditure (In M Euro)

Category	Amount (Euros)	Mainly paid by...
Staff		
Library staff	39.700.440	Frenchspeaking Community (70%)
Administrative Staff	Unknown	Provincial and municipal authorities
Other	6185267	
Operational		
Stock	6.021.640	
Other	1144026	
Infrastructure		
Hardware	303000	
Financing		
Ordinary financing	34.448.276	Municipal, provincial and asbl authorities
Ordinary financing Frenchspeaking Community	11.271.000	<i>Frenchspeaking Community</i>
Other	1.347.876	
Extraordinary		
Expenditure	3.629.460	
Grand Total	104.050.985	

Museums - Dutch Speaking

Flanders counts 300 museums. They are diverse in type and size: small and big museums, ethnographical museums, museums for the fine arts, thematic and historic museums,...

At this moment, 43 museums have been recognized under the requirements of the Museum Decree.

The most important and biggest museums are managed by:

- the three largest cities (Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges)
- the provinces
- the Flemish Community: the KMSKA, a museum and scientific institution, and the MuHKA.

Information and Communication Technology in Local Institutions

[Back to Contents](#)

Public Libraries - Dutch Speaking

Most, if not all, public libraries dispose of an automated catalogue and transactions system. Automation is the local authority's responsibility; there is no financial support whatsoever from the Flemish Government.

However, the Flemish Government has connected all public libraries to the Internet in the framework of the BIBNET-project, launched in 1997. BIBNET is an intranet for public libraries, offering not only hardware and broadband to access the net, but also providing a website both for librarians as well as library customers: <http://www.bibliotheek.be> BIBNET provides a scale of service such as the Flemish union catalogue (see below), quality-selected websites, a site for children and the possibility for libraries to compose their own website. Approximately 25% of all public libraries dispose of a homepage, mainly giving access to their OPAC.

a. Union Catalogue

VLACC is the union catalogue of the six largest public libraries. It contains nearly 600.000 records: the majority books, but also journal abstracts and a small number of video and cd-rom. Audio-cd are not included. It is the basis for the interlibrary loan system and is used by individual libraries for downloading bibliographic records. VLACC is available on CD-Rom and via BIBNET.

Actually, VLACC is being re-designed to become a genuine catalogue of the holdings of all public libraries in Flanders. This union catalogue –called VLACC II- will be a stepping stone for the public libraries towards a Flemish Digital Library, which will be integrated in the day-to-day work processes. The implementation of this catalogue will have a direct impact on about 10 % of working hours in the sector, which are spent on the cataloguing back office tasks.

In 2004, the old catalogue (which is a background bibliographic pool) will be converted, and the pilot project will be set up. In 2005, all public libraries will be systematically included in the new catalogue. Spread over several years, the whole project will cost about 9 million Euros.

b. Building the Flemish Digital Library

VCOB operates as a broker for contracts with providers of electronic information. Access to the digital collections is organized via subscription through the local libraries. If possible VCOB creates, in co-operation with the libraries, added value to these electronic collections. E.g.: VCOB not only acquires digital newspapers but also develops electronic clipping files especially suited for the library users.

- establishing an up to date broadband connection linking all public libraries
- creating a professional website (the librarians sub-site of www.bibliotheek.be) supporting professional communication within the sector budgeted at € 230.200 in 2004

Public Libraries - French Speaking

All public libraries dispose of an automated catalogue and transactions system.

A growing number of libraries provide public internet access and library staff is getting acquainted with new information technologies.

There is no catalogue for all the French speaking Community. But some:

The « Catalogue Collectif Bruxellois informatisé en ligne (CCBI)» for the Brussels Region. The *CCBI* is implanted in 10 municipalities on 19 and represents 2/3 of the inhabitants of the Brussels Region. This catalogue contains more than 550000 records. The objective is to share the cost to reduce them.

In Walloon Region, the project is to create a collective catalogue by province.

A comprehensive proposal (245.000 EURO) has been put forward:

- to connect all public libraries to the internet
- to grant purchase of public internet access terminals
- to support the automation processes

Resource sharing over the internet: abstracting, cataloguing, virtual libraries, ...

The terms and obligations of the Local Cultural Policy Decree offer scope and create a framework for co-operation and synergy between public libraries and local cultural community centres. There are no obligations towards co-operation with museums and archives, but one may expect that the co-operational attitude incited by the Decree will result in growing partnerships between MLA-institutions also.

Public Libraries - Dutch Speaking

a. Innovation Through Scaling Up

See: chapter above Information and Communication Technology

b. Stimulating knowledge Based Library Management

Starting from 2002, the libraries must write a policy plan and report on a regular basis their progress in realizing their plan. VCOB supports the libraries during the planning process and stimulates the development of an integral local cultural policy. This is done by the VCOB in close collaboration with the Flemish government and "Local Culture", another supporting agency. In the coming two years VCOB intends to develop two instruments for the library branch:

- The innovation of library statistics, and the development of a system for benchmarking between libraries based on those statistics.
- The development of relevant and transparent indicators to support librarians in evaluating their own policy.

c. Supporting internal organisation processes

- Developing a competence based human resources management in libraries.
- Optimising work processes

d. Reader Development and Enhancing Information Literacy

VCOB takes actions and creates instruments to support libraries in enhancing the cultural and information literacy of customers. Two collaborations have priority:

- In collaboration with the Reading Foundation (*Stichting Lezen Vlaanderen*), several campaigns are organized: "Youth Book Week", "Fahrenheit 451", "Read to others" Week, etc.
- In collaboration with CANON, the culture team within the Department of Education, VCOB is developing a website to support librarians and teachers concerning cultural and information literacy.

Public Libraries - Dutch Speaking

The Flemish standard used for cataloguing is DMARC and AACR2standard. A number of guidelines for cataloguing in the union database have been published.

There is a standard format for policy planning.

There are no other standards or guidelines. The national support centre will develop different standards in the near future.

Public Libraries - French Speaking

The standard used in public libraries are :

- ISBD : International Standard Bibliographic Description
- AFNOR Z44 – 073

Format used in public libraries : UNIMARC

Directory *RAMEAU* (Répertoire d'Autorité-Matière Encyclopédique, Alphabétique, Unifié) for indexation.

Joint activities between Libraries, Museums and Archives

Dutch Speaking

- Archives Database and VLACC use a common set of keywords
- Organisation of Joint public campaigns

Research

Public Libraries

A large-scale user survey was carried out in 2004 in co-operation with 169 public libraries. The data of this survey will be analyzed in co-operation with a research unit of the Brussels University VUB which is also a partner in a scientific consortium which is organizing a broad public survey on cultural participation in Flanders. Both surveys taken together will give a good picture of the socio-cultural profile of library users in comparison to the profile of Flemish people in general and in comparison to the profile of the non-library user.