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Libraries Serving the General Public - Supporting Human Culture and Values

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Abstract

The work of the 7 Sections in the Libraries Serving the General Public Division supports human culture and values through 5 categories of activities: professional communication, developing policy, developing services, advocating for change, and promoting literacy and reading. Examples are given for each category. The author begins with professional communication because it is the most fundamental activity of any association and ends with literacy and reading because they are core components in any free society in which human culture and values can flourish.

Good afternoon everyone. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Open Forum of Libraries Serving the General Public, IFLA's largest Division. My name is John Day and I am the Chair of this Division.

The title of our program is *Libraries as vital partners in the social and cultural fabric of modern society* and we have 3 excellent speakers who will talk about their experiences with libraries, culture, society, and diversity.

Before we begin, however, I have the honor of showing how the work of this Division, in and of itself, supports human culture and values. As in all IFLA divisions, the actual work is initiated and coordinated by the member Sections.

This division includes 7 Sections and they are:

- Public Libraries
- Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons
- Libraries for Children and Young Adults
- School Libraries and Resource Centers
- Libraries for the Blind
- Library Services to Multicultural Populations
- Mobile Libraries

As the name of our Division implies, we work to serve all people in all countries around the world. The general public. The first Section I mentioned was “Public Libraries” and the very nature of public libraries is to serve their general population in their targeted geographic area. Yet because the mission of our Division is to serve all people everywhere, over the course of IFLA’s history we have identified certain populations that need special attention. And that is why we have the additional 6 sections to provide the focus and additional assistance necessary to constantly strive to indeed serve all people everywhere.

So, how does this Division support human culture and values? I have explained this Division’s mission and shown how we have organized to carry out our work in order to give some background information that will help provide an understanding. There are essentially 5 categories of activities by which the Sections’ work supports human culture and values. They are:

1. Professional Communication
2. Developing Policy
3. Developing Services
4. Advocating for Change
5. Promoting Literacy and Reading

The work of this Division is simply too extensive to give a complete accounting of the activities of all of its sections in each of these categories. Instead, I will talk about a few examples in each.

Professional Communication

I have listed professional communication first because it is the most important thing we do. Without it, nothing else could happen. In fact, professional communication is the basic building material of any and all professional associations. Within IFLA, it is the communication between professionals from diverse cultures that provides the unique opportunity to achieve broader understanding of our profession and the ability to have a positive impact on the lives of people all over the world.

During this conference alone, the Sections of this Division have organized over 30 working meetings and public programs in order to achieve and share the results and

benefits of their work. Additionally all of these Sections carry on their work throughout the year. Some by mid-year meetings in various parts of the world as did the Public Library Section in Bologna, Italy in March. Some additionally through communications technology such as the SLBSC IFLA listserv operated by the Libraries for the Blind Section and certainly all Sections through the use of email. This work is carried further throughout the profession by the organization of “Expert Meetings” and “Training Sessions” such as the recent preconference on Library Services for the Blind in the Caribbean that included blind consumers, librarians, and government leaders. Another example is the very highly successful workshop in Jerusalem on “Library Services to Arab Communities around the World” given by the Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section.

Developing Policy

Both the Public Libraries Section and the School Libraries and Resource Centers Section have helped set international and national library and information policy.

The Public Libraries Section has partnered with UNESCO and written the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto which begins with the statement, “Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and of individuals are fundamental human values.” It has been translated into many languages and, with the most recent additions of Khmer and Hebrew, 24 of the translations are available on IFLANET, <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s8/unesco/manif.htm>.

The School Libraries and Resource Centers Section has also partnered with UNESCO to write and issue the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto. This manifesto is also available in over 20 languages on IFLANET <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s11/pubs/schoolmanif.htm>, including Icelandic and Xhosa. The manifesto contains a listing of nine activities that are “essential to the development of literacy, information literacy, teaching, learning and culture and are core school library services.”

Developing Services

The natural next step after developing policy is to write guidelines for services and standards for materials. Such publications are very useful obtaining the necessary decisions and commitment of resources for all types of services.

The Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons Section has written guidelines for services to people who are in hospital, elderly people, people who are in prison, deaf people, and people with dyslexia. This Section has also written guidelines for the production of easy-to-read materials. These publications have been published by IFLA in the Professional Reports Series <http://www.ifla.org/V/pr/index.htm>, where you can also find guidelines written by the School Libraries and Resource Centers Section, the Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section, Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section, and the Mobile Libraries Section.

The Libraries for the Blind Section has fostered the development of a consortium for digital audio, the DAISY Consortium; it has endorsed the formulation of standards for digital book development; and, it has published guidelines for services to people who use Braille. Additionally, it expects to publish its guidelines "Libraries for the Blind in the Information Age: Guidelines for Development" next year. The Public Libraries Section has written guidelines for public library service, which has been published by K. G. Saur Verlag <http://www.ifla.org/V/saur.htm>. Furthermore, the Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section works with all types of libraries to ensure that they understand that undertaking the social responsibility of bridging the cultural gaps and promoting the various cultures of their populations is essential.

Advocating for Change

In addition to the development of standards and guidelines, the Libraries Serving the General Public Division has been a strong advocate for change by preparing additional publications and by partnering with other agencies. These publications include:

- *Mobile libraries in the World Community*
- *Young people and Reading; An International Perspective*
- *Proceedings of the PanAfrican PanArab Conference on Public and School Libraries*
- *The Donkey Drawn Mobile Library Services in Zimbabwe*
- *Camel Library Services in Kenya*
- *Resource Guide on Access to and Interlending of Alternative Format Materials (Libraries Serving the Blind)*
- *International Directory of Libraries for the Blind*
- *International Resource Book for Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons*

These publications can also be found within the IFLA Professional Reports and IFLA Saur Publications series.

Partnering with other agencies is a successful means to effect positive change and as previously noted, the Public Libraries Section and the School Libraries and Resource Centers Section have developed and published manifestos in cooperation with UNESCO. Additionally, the Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons Section, Libraries Serving the Blind Section, and the Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section have developed "Consultative Status" relationships with the European Dyslexia Association, the International Board on Books for Young People, the World Blind Union, and the World Federation of the Deaf.

Furthermore, this Division has a very special "Consultative Status" relationship with the International Association of Library Centres, through which representatives of that organization formally participate in the Division's Coordinating Board as Special Advisors.

Promoting Literacy and Reading

Literacy promotion is perhaps the most fundamentally important activity of this Division. In step with Kay Raseroka's IFLA Presidential Theme, "Libraries for Lifelong Literacy," Libraries Serving the General Public foster the development of library collections and services and the dissemination of library materials. The "Life Long Learning Project" of the Public Libraries Section is a prime example.

The Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section has long focused on the development of libraries and collections for children all over the world. Through its very successful project, Books for All, and again partnering with UNESCO, the Section developed and disseminated reading collections for children and young people in the school and public libraries in developing countries for 30 years. This Section is now one of the nominating bodies for newly established Astrid Lindgren Award promoting literature for children. The work of the Libraries Serving the Blind Section has had a profound effect on the development and availability of Braille and audio book collections all over the world.

Many of the foreign language collections in public libraries are the result of the work of the Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section. The existence and quality of many libraries in hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons have been influenced by the publications of the Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons Section. In addition to the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto, the School Libraries and Resource Centers Section has produced the publication, "The School Library Today and Tomorrow," to promote the importance of school libraries and their centrality to the intellectual, spiritual, and political life of every society.

The mobile library demonstration in Glasgow was one of the most popular events and could not help but to have an impact on the dissemination of library materials in the home countries of the conference participants. And the Mobile Libraries Section's work in documenting services in Kenya and Zimbabwe serve as shining examples of bringing libraries to people everywhere in any way necessary, be it on the backs of camels, or donkeys, or on the backs of elephants in Thailand, or on boats in Norway, or for that matter even in big shiny bookmobiles that many of us are most familiar with.

Conclusion

This paper has been a sampling of the ways the Libraries Serving the General Public Division supports human culture and values. I began with professional communication because, as I mentioned, it is our most fundamental activity. I have ended with literacy and reading because they are what everything else we librarians do is about. And, most importantly, literacy and reading are the absolutely core components of any free society in which human culture and values can flourish.