



Kick off paper for discussion of the presidential theme
2007 – 2009:
Libraries on the Agenda!

**Presidential Theme of IFLA's President-Elect
Claudia Lux**

Date : 11/08/2006

Meeting:	106	President-Elect's Planning Session
Simultaneous Interpretation:	No	
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IFLA2006 participants are cordially invited to:

The President Elect's Planning Session: „Libraries on the Agenda“

**Part 1 & 2 takes place:
IFLA 2006 Seoul: Tuesday 22 August 2006
(Part 1: 8:30 – 10:30 and Part 2: 10:45 – 12:45)**

Abstract:

1. Our situation of advocacy (from international to local level)
2. What does "Libraries on the Agenda!" mean? (take part in many different activities involving different political departments, even though they might think that they have no responsibility for libraries.)
3. Who is the focus of our advocacy? (besides cultural and education departments there are more political possibilities)
4. Which are the most suitable topics to deal with? (for discussion in the session)
5. Which methods are successful? (for discussion in the session)
6. Who should be involved? (for discussion in the session)
7. What should our performance be like? (for discussion in the future)

1. Our situation of advocacy

In all our discussions, libraries have frequently mentioned that they are not a focus of political decision making, although they are able to contribute in so many ways to the development of our society.

First of all: Is it good or bad to be the focus of political attention?

There cannot be just one answer to this question only, as we have seen many cases where political attention has led to restrictions to the libraries' daily work, has hindered their endeavours to provide free access to information to their clients and threatened their way to acquire all kinds of books with all kind views of the world. As the UNESCO Manifest for Public Libraries states clearly: "Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures."

What is to be included in library collections should be down to professional decision making on the part of librarians without the influence of politicians and political pressure groups. This responsibility of librarians is based on their professional training.

To deal with cases in which this is not respected, IFLA has created its own core activity with FAIFE, the office for Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression, which aims to further the key issue of intellectual freedom, by monitoring the state of that freedom in different countries, cooperating with other agencies and responding on IFLA's behalf to violations of the principle.

I am going to present an answer to my first question: I think it is good to be a focus of political attention and to be involved in administrative planning processes. And my presidential theme 'Libraries on the Agenda!' aims to emphasize precisely that.

The present situation of advocacy for libraries is not entirely bad, yet our political role can be strengthened. Politics has been defined by the German sociologist Max Weber as consisting of three main elements: power, organization and values.

I think all of you will agree, when I say that librarians might not be overly powerful when it comes to getting their ideas accepted against the influence of others, but we can learn to do something about it.

We all know that we have better possibilities of exerting our influence on politicians and administrations by taking an active part in planning and organizing, considering that we have many creative ideas and a strong group of libraries behind us, which are able to contribute to numerous aspects of society.

Our values are stronger and more convincing than those of many other lobbyists. Librarians have a wide range of values such as free access to information, bridging the digital divide, life long learning, stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people; fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity, supporting the oral tradition and promoting awareness of cultural heritage, etc.

Using the wide range of values and our ability to organize information we should be able to advocate for libraries and to influence political decision makers

2. What does “Libraries on the Agenda!” mean?

“Libraries on the Agenda” means, that we will activate our members and enable them to speak up on every occasion to advocate for libraries.

IFLA is an international association with librarians from many different countries and different experience of advocacy. The President Elect Theme “Libraries on the Agenda!” will summarize different aspects, adequate methods and successful practise of advocacy from all over the world to develop an advocacy handbook for libraries. Your own experience and your ideas shared with librarians from all over the world will be a rich base of the daily advocacy work for ‘Libraries on the Agenda!’.

Most of our libraries and their management have more or less strong connections with the departments of culture, education or science within the political administration of their respective country, region, or community. They have more or less good relations to the representatives of the university, school or institute they work for.

This means for the cultural department and its political representatives that librarians are standing up in order to lobby against or together with other partners like museums, archives, operas, music-halls etc. In the educational sector we have to look for partnerships within or with schools, universities and other educational institutions which are much bigger and will therefore receive more attention from the respective department

Libraries have to put forward arguments to prove why they are as important as other cultural and educational sectors and why they deserve to be supported and receive better financial assistance.

While we know of our influence in the areas of culture and education where we have already found many possibilities to get on the agenda, we should aim for more. Many politicians tend to stick libraries into a cultural or educational drawer. But compared to other cultural institutions, libraries are involved in far more areas where they can assist in problem solving.

For this reason libraries should be on the agenda of e.g. city planning, because libraries are important for the life in a city and can make a big difference to the urban environment.

For this reason libraries should be on the agenda of migration politics, because libraries can help immigrants with countless issues of information, language training courses, assistance in matters of social support and contact.

For this reason libraries should be on the agenda of economic development, as they can provide extensive information to small and medium business people.

For this reason libraries should be on the agenda of health politics because they can supply all kinds of information on health issues, from addresses of specialized health practitioners to matters of prevention.

There are many more areas at all political levels where libraries can make a difference or just assist further development.

In other words, we should not get stuck in the one or two drawers in which politicians would tend to see us, but we should claim our place in many more drawers and take part in many different activities involving different political departments, even though they might think that they have no responsibility for libraries. The more we facilitate their job with our dedicated library information work, the better our chances to receive their support and their financial help. This is what I mean by “Libraries on the Agenda!”.

3. Who is the focus of our advocacy?

The focus of our advocacy includes political decision makers at international, national, regional, and community levels.

On the national level, libraries will address their political representatives in parliament, in the cultural or the educational ministry. However, libraries can also be of interest to other ministerial departments, even though their possible role may not yet be recognized or their value might be thought to be relevant only to issues of culture and education.

Librarians do carry out advocacy work on a regional and community level where besides their activities in the cultural and education field they try to get onto agendas of regional development, city planning, information society etc.

At the university level it is important to have libraries on the agenda, too. There they will sometimes be forgotten, as their role in planning is not being considered. Special libraries within an institution frequently face the same situation; they are not involved in the planning of research projects which they are expected to support.

“Libraries on the Agenda” is not only an activity of library directors and library associations. At the same time, librarians taking part in community life, be it with their children in kindergarten and in school or with a home for the aged, a new business centre. They may stand up and talk about the possibilities that libraries have to add to this aspect of community life and why libraries have to be a on the agenda.

The level at which our advocacy takes place is important.

As you all know, there is no international government, but there are international forums and activities where IFLA as an organization has to advocate, like WSIS, UNESCO, WIPO and others.

This is a major task for our IFLA bodies, for the Secretary General, and, in particular, for the President of IFLA. But as you know, our success in WSIS is due to the great activities of our Swiss colleagues, who I want to thank very much and I also want to thank Tuula Haavisto whom we engaged to direct our attention to these aspects and keep us continuously up to date. No way IFLA could manage this essential advocacy work without those two pillars of support.

We have learnt a lot from this process, for instance, how and at what stage to best exercise influence on the contents of forthcoming papers, how to be able to speak at the summit's plenum, and how to cooperate with many other NGO's. None of this would have been possible without the support and the active involvement of many national library associations and their delegates.

We know now that we have a dedicated team of convincing personalities, much knowledge of processes of the summit's organisation, solid arguments written in clear language, outstanding examples of libraries' contributions to an information society collected in an impressive international database and partners on different levels supporting all or part of our goals.

4. Which are the most suitable topics to deal with?

This session will discuss the most suitable topics to deal with. Many libraries have already made their contribution to the task of advocating libraries. They have been collected in a 'success database', which illustrates wonderfully that libraries are an invaluable part of the information society; each report is one more argument for libraries.

Others have written something in favour of academic and public libraries, of libraries in the life long learning process and as partners in the information literacy program. Let us gather all the good arguments to make it easier for librarians to advocate for libraries in all fields. And they also discussed, how librarians should behave themselves, when they are advocating for their goals.

I ask you to take part in this session and discuss the following questions and contribute to this first session of my Presidential Theme "Libraries on the Agenda"

Who is the focus of our advocacy?
Which are the most suitable topics to deal with?
Which methods are successful?
Who should be involved?
What should the librarians' performance be like?

"Libraries on the Agenda!" means that library associations and librarians are enabled to engage in various activities to make libraries a focus of political decision making.

There are outstanding examples from all over the world and it is my hope that those active librarians will participate in the discussion and pass their knowledge on to others so as to broaden the advocacy skills of our members.

Claudia Lux
August 2006