



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 145-E
Meeting: 103. Opening Session
Simultaneous Interpretation: Yes

IFLA Report 2003

Christine Deschamps

President

Adalbert von Chamisso, a celebrated German writer of the 18th Century, wrote that he was German in France, and French in Germany. I think it is this spirit of universal belonging which must characterise cooperation and solidarity within IFLA. Today I would like to establish with you the balance sheet of the past six years, and I would like to do so remembering that these key words 'solidarity', 'multicultural cooperation' and 'multilingualism' are the best guides to our activities.

The evolution of IFLA

In six years, IFLA has undergone profound changes: the measures taken have all been decided in collegial fashion, and drafted up by our Secretary General or members of the Governing Board or the Professional Committee. I think you will nevertheless allow me to claim some credit for this work in cooperation with the various other authors. No President works entirely alone...

The first measure, the most important in my view, is certainly the drafting of the new IFLA statutes. I remember presenting them to you with the words: "institutions, like people, grow old". We have tried to rejuvenate IFLA, to give it better structures, better adapted to the international environment, and allowing more democratic working. We come today to the most representative of these changes: for the first time, a President Elect is going to take over from the incumbent President, for two years, while a new President Elect will naturally take his place in the process. IFLA has spent much effort on this work of rejuvenation, rationalisation and improved administration, and we hope that you are already starting to feel its effects.

One of the first measures that we took, immediately, contributing to the democratisation of IFLA, was the decision to hold elections by postal ballot and not only by voting at the Conference. In this way, the least developed countries, which could not previously be represented at the Council, not even by proxy, can henceforth make their voices heard directly. We hope that this gives them a truer idea of the interest we take in them and of the extent to which we value their opinion.

Aiming at the same objective of helping countries experiencing difficulties, we finally managed to reduce the levels of IFLA membership subscriptions: the countries classed by the United Nations as least developed now pay a subscription rate reduced by 60%. And I can tell you that, at a time when the economic climate is difficult for everyone, this measure was not easy to achieve. It seemed to me absolutely necessary, however, to give substance to the term 'solidarity', and demonstrate our fierce determination to bring together librarians of all countries, including the least privileged.

Similarly, to help a category of IFLA members who, not having paid employment, are obviously in a difficult situation, we significantly reduced the subscription rates for students of librarianship.

Finally, for young information professionals in developing countries, thanks to the support of OCLC, UNESCO and the American Library Association, we were able to set up the joint IFLA/OCLC training programme to help young librarians build on their initial training by coming to the United States to visit libraries and associations, and get to know the range of services offered by OCLC. The programme could not be run this year because of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) virus, but we hope that next year the programme will be able to bring together this year's winners as well as those of 2004! I wish to thank all the partners who are helping us to maintain this programme, and especially OCLC, whose unfailing generosity allows young people to develop their professional skills.

IFLA's international activities

Over the last six years, IFLA has greatly developed its international relations with various member organisations of the United Nations system. Traditionally, we have always worked together very positively with UNESCO, and of course we continue to do so. But I would like to point out a programme that is (unfortunately) more relevant than ever: this is the International Committee of the Blue Shield. This Committee, created in close cooperation with UNESCO, brings together as you know representatives of IFLA, the International Council on Archives, the International Council of Museums, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites. It works, in collaboration with our Preservation and Conservation programme, to protect museums, archives, libraries, monuments and sites in case of natural disaster (earthquake, flood, fire) and in case of war. And, alas, the Blue Shield has had to expend a large part of its efforts on the effects of war, in the last few years, whether in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan or more recently in Iraq. But let us not forget either the terrible floods of 2002 in Europe. In view of the seriousness of these cases, and their symbolic value, the Blue Shield has just received funding, at last: thanks to the generosity of the Prince Claus Foundation in the Netherlands, we hope that we will succeed in providing vital assistance to libraries in need, and in showing, yet again, that 'solidarity' is not an empty word for IFLA.

We have also worked, as usual, with other UN bodies (WIPO, ISO, et al), but above all we have succeeded in introducing 'libraries' into programmes for international development, which is quite new and of great significance. I need only cite our participation in the G8 DOT Force and now in the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society. This requires us to make a huge effort, given the workload involved, but one that is essential in order to demonstrate the importance of library services in the emergence of this new society. Thanks to our friends in the Swiss library community, we have been able to take advantage of unparalleled local support, representation and logistical infrastructure, which put us in a strong position to work in Geneva in an effective and sustained way. You will hear more said about this later in the Conference, but I would just like to emphasise that this is the first time we have been associated in this way with such a World Summit. Let us hope that the results will not disappoint us!

IFLA's Core Activities

There too, new activities have emerged, while other older ones have had to be reviewed and totally renewed.

New Committees

I would like to mention first of all the two Committees which came into existence just at the moment when I took over the presidency in 1997: that is, CLM and FAIFE.

CLM plays an important role not only in representing the interests of libraries in copyright matters, but in advising on all matters giving rise to the drafting of legal texts of various agreements, licences, etc in the traditional library field but also in the very new field of electronic publications.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chair of CLM, Marianne Scott, for her thorough work and her boundless energy. Parallel to the work of CLM, we also set up a joint working group with the International Publishers Association, this time thanks to Ingrid Parent (again, clearly, Canada has greatly helped us). For the first time, publishers and librarians worked in partnership on issues of some political and economic sensitivity, without clashing, and ended by recognising the roles and needs of each partner. We have not succeeded in resolving all the difficulties - that would have been done long ago if it had been easy to do - but we talk together, we work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and we publish joint declarations which testify to our good cooperation and which are so many steps forward in the right direction!

The other Committee of which we are extremely proud is the FAIFE Committee for Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression. This Committee is working in financial conditions that have become very difficult, after having benefitted for a long time from the generosity of the Danish Government. It has produced an International Report which is, on the subject of censorship, the equivalent (on a different scale) of the Report of Amnesty International. We are proud of the activities of FAIFE in all areas where librarians have had to suffer restrictions on their freedom to work, on their own personal freedom or that of their readers. We hope to be able to find the financial resources to continue this very important work, in which IFLA is fulfilling its obligations as an international NGO in the humanitarian sense of the word.

Older Core Programmes

In recent years you have learned that the funds available for the operation of our older Core Programmes were exhausted, and that we therefore needed to re-examine the situation starting again from the basics. Our Treasurer had presented to you the sad state of the separate finances of these activities. We therefore tried to find solutions in cooperation with the libraries which fund and/or host these programmes. The end result is as follows:

- The UAP Programme (Universal Availability of Publications) has been closed down. It achieved its aim, and therefore no longer exists at the British Library. There remains only the 'International IFLA Voucher Scheme' which has been taken over by IFLA Headquarters in The Hague, and the biennial International Lending and Document Supply Conference.
- PAC (Preservation and Conservation) is unchanged, thanks to the generosity of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
- ALP (Advancement of Librarianship Programme) has also been retained. Unfortunately its activities will be somewhat curtailed, given the reduction in funding from the Danish Government and DANIDA. The University of Uppsala continues to house this programme.
- UBCIM (Universal Bibliographic Control and International MARC) has been terminated as such. Responsibility for the maintenance of UNIMARC has been taken over by the National Library of Portugal, and the rest has been combined with the UDT activities taken over by Die Deutsche Bibliothek.
- UDT (Universal Dataflow and Telecommunications) has also been closed down as such. Die Deutsche Bibliothek has agreed to take over part of its activities, linked to the UBC activities which the Deutsche Bibliothek also wants to continue. Hosting of IFLANET has been taken over by INIST (Institut pour l'Information Scientifique et Technique), with mirror sites in New York (at Queens Public Library) and in Singapore (at the National Library).

I would like to highlight here the key role of the Conference of Directors of National Libraries, whose support has enabled us to find solutions for these activities. Our thanks also go the libraries which have at various times helped IFLA to carry out these core activities, and which continue to help in various ways. I particularly want to thank the Royal Library of the Netherlands which hosts IFLA Headquarters. Without the constant generous support of these institutions, we could not perform as well as we do nor achieve the same results.

General IFLA operations

We must not forget that, in the midst of all those activities, IFLA also carried out its traditional functions: organisation of the annual Conference, IFLA Publications, travel and representation of IFLA, routine operations during the year.

1. Organisation of the annual Conference:

There too we imposed some order on procedures that were somewhat vague. Not only did we lay down criteria for selection of candidate cities (previously, the first candidate had been accepted practically automatically), but we organised a procedure for selection of candidates by the Conference Planning Committee, so as to make the selection more democratic and more transparent.

We have had excellent conferences: Amsterdam, Bangkok, Jerusalem, Boston, Glasgow, and today Berlin. The professional content as well as the practical organisation have steadily improved, and I think you all have good memories of those conferences, and that an important aspect of multilingualism within IFLA is certainly the translation of IFLA Express into our various working languages. When I arrived, this publication, so useful before and during the Conference, existed only in English. Today it is translated into the four other languages. That was an important measure, paid for by each of the language communities, which helps us defend linguistic diversity within IFLA. I remain persuaded of the importance of this cultural diversity in order to better integrate the major languages of our institution.

2. IFLA Publications:

IFLA publications have been produced following the usual timetable and deadlines. Our thanks go to our publisher K.G. Saur for his support, to the new editor of the IFLA Journal, Stephen Parker, to the Publications Committee, and to the Editorial Committees who worked on it.

3. Travel and visits:

I have always thought it most important to consider my role as to bring people together, to get all our members working together.

IFLA is so diverse and varied that it is essential to nourish the spirit of solidarity, cohesion and belonging which is shared by all our members. I will not recite here the names of all the countries that I have visited during my Presidency. I have travelled a lot, I have been in poor countries and in rich countries, in libraries of all types, large and small. Everywhere I have seen devoted and enthusiastic professionals who have achieved inspiring things, regardless of their countries' level of economic or technological development. As I leave IFLA I am more than ever committed to libraries and to the role they can play in countries' development and the social and economic integration of their users. I would just like to say that libraries do not need huge resources in order to provide useful and necessary services to our users. It is occasionally the poorest who show the greatest imagination and creativity in this area. We thank them for this lesson in humility and solidarity (there is that word again!).

4. Routine operations:

Over these past six years we have had 24 meetings of the Governing Board, 144 meetings of committees of the Governing Board, quick decisions taken by email, 12 Council sessions with voting, 3 years with voting (for Standing Committees, for the Governing Board and for the President-Elect) to prepare by correspondence with all the paperwork that that implies, 5 external audits and inspections of our balance sheet, 2 publicity campaigns to recruit a new Secretary General - and the routine operations of IFLA have been faultless. And I must state clearly that we went through two crises: the first when the Secretary General in office in 1998 left us suddenly in December of that year, obliging us to replace him urgently, and the second when our present Secretary General had serious health problems requiring

major surgery - which, too, was urgent. We had no choice but to keep IFLA functioning in their absence. We also had to organise the transfer of IFLANET from one site to another, with Sophie Felföldi becoming our webmaster. Similarly, the transfer of the Voucher Scheme required a lot of work.

It was only with the support and exemplary commitment of the staff of IFLA Headquarters that we could do all that - and yet, we must have demanded a lot from them, since at the present time, of the team that I found in The Hague when I became President, only Sophie (the very same) is still there!. Magda Bouwens, Sjoerd Koopman, Kelly Moore, Josche Neven, Stephen Parker, Karin Passchier, Susan Schaepman, Ross Shimmon and Christine Zuidwijk (listed in alphabetical order) have all arrived since!

But it is clear that nothing of what we have managed to achieve would have been possible without their dedication, nor without the dedication of their predecessors! Our thanks go to them all.

I would also like to thank the French Government which relieved me of the need to engage in other professional work, so that I could the better devote myself fully to leading IFLA. During those six years, the French Ministry of Education paid my salary, and subsidised my travel costs and general operating expenses. They have been extremely generous. That also proves the esteem in which my government holds IFLA, something which has always delighted me. My renewed thanks to them.

Conclusion

There! We have come to the end of those six years. Six years seems a very long time, but when you want to achieve things, the time passes quickly.

There will always be people who will say that we should have done more, or done things differently. That is inevitable, and I myself would have liked to better manage the transition to our first President-Elect, Kay Raseroka.

But one cannot do everything, and to err is only human. Nevertheless, I would like to gauge our results against two numerical standards: IFLA membership, which stood at 1514 in 1997, while today it stands at 1754; and the number of conference participants: 3500 at the Amsterdam conference, 4000 at Boston, 4500 at Glasgow, and - at the time of writing these lines - it appears that we may draw even more to Berlin. I like to think that this proves the vitality, the modernity and the smooth running of our institution. I think I can say that I am leaving it in good hands with Kay, and I wish her success. Long live IFLA!

With these words I declare the World Library and Information Congress, the 69th IFLA Conference open !