

# Libraries on the Agenda! The President-Elect's Planning Session in Seoul

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## Some General Remarks

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From 20–24 August 2006, some 5,000 library and information professionals attended the World Library and Information Congress (WLIC), 72<sup>nd</sup> IFLA General Conference And Council, in Seoul, South Korea. The Congress offers an excellent opportunity for orientation and networking. Another reason to attend is to meet the members of IFLA Headquarters, such as IFLA President Alex Byrne or President-Elect Claudia Lux, in person. In preparation for her presidency in 2007, Professor Dr. Claudia Lux invited the participants to join her President-Elect's Planning Session on August 22. On 24 August the results of this session were presented before the IFLA Council, and are summarized in this report.

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## Scoring a Bull's Eye

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Claudia Lux will be in office from 2007–2009. She invited participants in WLIC Seoul to share their ideas about the theme and programme for her period of office, *Libraries on the Agenda!* – a title which, at the same time, is suitable for an effective slogan for the programme.

Approximately 80 participants met in a workshop to discuss the theoretical and practical challenges provoked by *Libraries on the Agenda!* The goal for the session was to initialize the programme and to get direct feedback from international experts.

The workshop was divided into two sessions. The first session comprised the presentation of a kick-off paper by Claudia Lux and brainstorming by the participants in work groups. The second comprised presentations of examples of best practice in connection with IFLA activities at

the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

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## Session One: Some Facts about Claudia Lux's Programme

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The aim of the programme, *Libraries on the Agenda!* is “to involve your government and your local decision makers in the concerns of libraries”. This will be achieved by a proactive strategy which will hopefully lead into a campaign for the promotion of libraries on the local, regional, national and international levels. In an interview with the German periodical *Buch und Bibliothek* (11–12/2005, pp. 772ff.) Claudia Lux interpreted her programme as follows: “We and decision makers must be sitting at the same table”.

After a short introduction to the program, Claudia Lux raised the following seven questions:

1. What is our situation of advocacy?
2. What does *Libraries on the Agenda!* mean?
3. Who is the focus of our advocacy?
4. Which are the most suitable topics to deal with?
5. Which methods are successful?
6. Who should be involved?
7. What should our performance be like?

Claudia Lux herself discussed questions 1–4, while questions 5–7 were assigned to the different working groups. The results of both parts of the session are summarized below.

### 1. What is our Situation of Advocacy?

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



*Claudia Lux*

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 libraries' daily work, hindered their endeavours to provide free access to information to their clients and threatened their ways of acquiring all kinds of books with all kind views of the world. As the UNESCO Manifesto 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.

Against this background Claudia Lux presented an answer to her first question: She thinks "it is good to be a focus of political attention and to be involved in administrative planning processes". And her presidential theme 'Libraries on the Agenda!' aims to emphasize precisely that. She went on: "The present situation of advocacy for libraries is not entirely bad, yet our political role can be strengthened". Referring to the German

sociologist Max Weber, she pointed out that politics consists of three main elements: power, organization and values.

It is assumed that all will agree, when she maintains 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 stand for 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?**

According to Claudia Lux 'Libraries on the Agenda!' means that we will activate our members and enable them to speak up on every occasion to advocate for libraries. And here IFLA comes into play. IFLA is an international association with librarians from many different countries and different experiences of advocacy. The President-Elect's theme 'Libraries on the Agenda!' aims to collect information on different aspects, adequate methods and successful practices of advocacy from all over the world in order 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 for the daily advocacy work for 'Libraries on the Agenda!'

Most libraries and their managements have more or less strong connections with the departments of culture, education or science within the political administration of their country, region, or

community. They have more or less good relations with 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 for the sake of culture. The best effect will be obtained by working together with other partners like museums, archives, 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 government departments.

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 is meant 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 fields, they try to get on to the agendas of regional development, city planning, the information society, etc.

At the university level or in other academic institutions 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.

Claudia Lux emphasized that 'Libraries on the Agenda!' is not only an activity of library directors and library associations. At the same time, librarians are taking part in community life, be it with children in kindergarten and in school or with a home for the aged or a new business centre. They may stand up and talk about the possibilities that libraries have to add to these aspects of community life and why libraries have to be on their agendas.

The level at which our advocacy takes place is important.

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 our success in WSIS is due to the great activities of our Swiss colleagues and Tuula Haavisto whom we engaged to direct our attention to these aspects and keep us continuously up to date. IFLA were hardly able to 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 NGOs. 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 the processes of the summit's organization, 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. (More results were shown in the second part of the President Elect's session in Seoul).

#### **4. Which are the Most Suitable Topics to Deal With?**

Many libraries have already made their contribution to the task of advocating libraries. These 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. Let us now find out how librarians should behave when they are advocating for their goals.

'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 Claudia Lux said that it was her hope that those active librarians would participate in the discussion here and at the next opportunity and pass their knowledge on to others so as to broaden the advocacy skills of our members.



*The working groups in session.*

### **Session One: Results from the Working Groups**

Ten working groups were formed to share experiences and find answers relating to the following questions:

- Which methods are successful?
- Who should be involved?
- Which arguments are best?

The results are summarized below.

#### **Which Methods are Successful?**

##### *Library focus*

- Install a public relations department in every library
- Copy the strategies of successful campaigners, e.g. successful fundraising methods or merchandising concepts
- Have a marketing plan
- Transparency – 'What is a library?'
- Library must be seen from the outside and not the inside out

- Enable staff (through training) how to analyze a context and best practices
- Involve the community

### *Lobbying focus*

- Lobbying, i.e. being active before problems arise
- Instead of asking – put something on the table
- Provide opinion leaders/politicians with useful information to support their work
  - on a personal and face-to-face level
  - you have to know the decision maker in person
- Networking in governmental structures
  - being involved in (critical) political issues
  - involvement policy (agenda setting)
  - being part of the political program
  - involve your library when election campaigns are going on
- Develop evidence-based data (to communicate library's impact)

### *LIS-association focus*

- Advocacy handbook for librarians
- Development of performance indicators
- Networking on local, national and international level (joint power structure)
- Identify stakeholders (those with tested interest in libraries)
- Cooperation with archives and museums

### **Who Should be Involved?**

#### *Multiplicator/opinion leader*

- Integrate people/celebrities from the outside e.g. pop stars, sportsmen
- Bringing decision-makers in, e.g. politicians in library associations (maybe a problem in opposition parties)
- Hired lobbyists
- User advocacy groups to spread messages
- Staff with full knowledge of mission, goals and objectives

#### *Institutions*

- All types of libraries, but there will be a need for leadership
- Library associations
- Community

- Business world, consumer organizations, trade unions, journalists, media, schools, rotary
- Cooperation with archives and museums
- Grassroots (NGOs)
- Library schools



*Intense discussion in one of the working groups.*

### **Which Arguments are Best?**

#### *Philosophy*

- Understanding political problems and the decision making process
- Libraries provides value for your city/community
- The UNESCO Manifesto and IFLA Guidelines
- Libraries are for all, to promote universal access to knowledge
- Stand up for values
- Get other people or institutions to speak for us

#### *Results driven arguments*

- Provide politicians with ideas for policy making (agenda setting)
- Show results and not only values i.e. presenting statistical data
- Having strong and united library associations which are actively supported by its members
- Having strategic alliances with the business world, consumer organizations, unions and other institutions

#### *Action*

- Show stakeholders what libraries can offer for individual information needs
- Invite all stakeholders and show them what libraries offer
- Address user needs

- Make libraries visible
  - Being prepared for discussion/confrontations
    - using statistics
    - storytelling
    - case studies
    - speaking with one voice
  - Finding politicians who are librarians
  - Networking of library associations
  - Getting librarians into governmental positions (librarians become politicians)
- getting librarians into governmental positions (librarians become politicians).

She thanked all colleagues who are supporting so generously and active IFLA's advocacy work at the World Summit on the Information Society and talked about the good examples of some library associations, how they used the WSIS for their "libraries development".

At the next World Library and Information Congress in Durban, the President-Elect will have a second brainstorming session about 'Libraries on the Agenda!', which will have a focus on the performance of librarians in their advocacy work.

Claudia Lux invites colleagues to write to her about their experiences in advocacy or on any activity or subject they want to add in a connection with her presidential theme 'Libraries on the Agenda!' Write to IFLA Headquarters or lux@zlb.de.

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### Session Two: Examples of Best Practice

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After a short break four papers were presented focusing on international best practice in connection with the World Summit on the Information Society:

- Tuula Haavisto (Finland): IFLA-Advocacy at WSIS
- Danielle Mincio (Switzerland): Use Success Database for Advocacy
- Dr. Dusan Katuscak (Slovakia): Library Policy in Slovakia
- Elizabet de Carvalho (Brazil): Successful LIS-policy in Brazil.

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### The Council Meeting

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At the end of the Council meeting on Thursday 24 August in Seoul President-Elect Claudia Lux gave a short report about the brainstorming meeting. She thanked all participants for their active and fruitful participation in this session and reported a few aspects of the results, picking some of the best arguments such as:

- having strong and united library associations which are actively supported by their members and speak with one voice – at least when they are talking to a politician
- provide politicians with ideas for policy making (agenda setting)
- show results and not only values i.e. presenting statistical data and
  - being prepared for discussion/confrontations
  - using statistics
  - storytelling
  - case studies
- to get other people or institutions to speak for us and last but not least

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### Final Remarks

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The brainstorming session in general and the lively discussion made clear that there is a need for advocacy policy focusing on library concerns on a local, regional, national and international level. The results lay the ground for further action at the WLIC in Durban in 2007 where we will discuss "how do we perform – how do politicians think you perform".

The participants in the sessions in Seoul valued the opportunity to share the experience of colleagues from different countries. The comment by Jens Boyer, Head Librarian at the Goethe-Institute in Tokyo, may serve to reflect the feelings of many of those present:

At least important for me as the lectures were the opportunity to meet with colleagues from all over the world. It was very useful for my project work in Japan. The same goes for Claudia Lux' planning and discussion session on August 22. Maybe something comparable could be adopted for the contributions made in the different conference sections.

#### Note

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