

Leaving Behind the Old Fashioned Drawer of Culture and Education
First IFLA Presidential Meeting at the German Foreign Office –
International Discussion on Free Access to Information

The conference hall was filled with intense discussions and top-level talks surrounded by a stimulating atmosphere and much international flair. Outdoors, quite a different scenario presented itself: Heralded by gale warnings on radio and internet, something was brewing above the city of Berlin on 18 January 2007. It evolved into the storm Kyrill at exactly the time when the 140 participants were about to conclude the first day of the first IFLA presidential meeting, contented and slightly tired, and to walk towards the Central and Regional Library Berlin in order to accept the cordial invitation extended by Prof. Dr. Claudia Lux, lady of the house. However, instead of joining the reception there, many of them ended up at their hotels - storm-tossed and soaking wet and earlier than anticipated. Only the most daring made it in time for the opening of the fascinating Hardenberg exhibition and to join a delicious buffet without any pushing or shoving.

In August 2007, the Director General of the Central and Regional Library Berlin, Prof. Dr. Claudia Lux, will be elected President of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions¹ at the IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Durban, South Africa. Following in the footsteps of her predecessors Gustav Hofmann (1958-1963) and Hans-Peter Geh (1985-1991), she will be the third German President of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. For the next two years, she will determine the fate of the Federation with its

¹ For information on IFLA see IFLANET: <http://www.ifla.org/>, or in German language <http://www.ifla-deutschland.de/>

1.700 members from altogether 150 countries representing approximately 500.000 libraries and information specialists worldwide. Three presidential meetings have been scheduled during the German presidential term from 2007–2009. The first presidential meeting has already taken place from 18–19 January 2007 at the conference hall of the German Foreign Office², aptly called “Europa Saal”. The choice of the conference location is programmatic and accentuates the reconciliation of libraries and politics – the presidential theme of Claudia Lux which won her the strong support of the German Foreign Office even before her presidential term began.

The Berlin conference entitled ‘Free Access to Information’ attracted approximately 140 colleagues from over 20 countries worldwide including Germany. The theme is a significant one, and, indeed, outright crucial for libraries and information specialists these days. And not only for our profession. The importance of free access to information in today’s information society was clearly demonstrated by the fact that the Minister of State at the German Foreign Office, Gernot Erler, personally opened the conference welcoming the guests. Excellent simultaneous interpreters competently translated the German talks into Russian and English just as speedily as they translated questions and lively discussions into German or into the other two languages. The atmosphere at the Foreign Office was pleasant and intense. The invitation of Dr. Gundula Felten, Head of Library and Information Services at the Foreign Office, to join a guided tour of the Library – located at the heart of the extensive building complex - during lunch break was received with keen interest.

² For information on the presidential meetings and the programme of the first conference see http://www.ifla-deutschland.de/de/ifla_praesidentschaft/meetings.html

Free access to information has consequences for various areas of work in the information sector and for the basic political and democratic principles of information. Their shape, substance and degree of intensity is indicated by the diversity of themes and papers from German and international specialists. What are the possible forms of cooperation and mutual support between a nation and her educational institutions? Dr. Ralf Goebel, Programme Director of the Scientific Library Services and Information Systems Division at the German Research Foundation (DFG), explained the national project initiative launched in Germany by defining the structure, tasks and possibilities of the DFG. The significance of a solid foundation as well as ongoing support and development in research and applied sciences for a high wage country like Germany lies in safeguarding her internationally leading position. The German nation requires strategies to promote science and education which, in turn, depend structurally and materially on libraries, archives and museums. „The access to sources of education and scientific information occupies a key role in safeguarding Germany’s competitiveness“. As for the supply of academic information this implies that students are granted the same access to quality information no matter where they are. An aim, so Goebel stressed, which might not be reached given the massive financial pressure on universities and libraries.

The differing developments of possible ways of access to cultural and academic information carry the risk of creating a cultural divide within society – within Germany as much as on an international level. The internet, in contrast, enables a democratization of information previously unknown – provided the access to it is guaranteed. The German Research Foundation advocates this concept by supporting the idea of

open access, the concept of national licences for electronic databases and periodicals for the benefit of German researchers as well as through international cooperation. The German Research Foundation which currently supports more than 20.000 individual projects with a total budget of approximately 1.300 million financed by Germany and its federal states has recognised the significance of scientific library services and information systems as well as the digitization of information, and has clearly shifted the budget in favour of this sector for years to come.

The following papers tangibly illustrated various possibilities of free access to information: The electronic periodicals database (EZB) at the University Library Regensburg was presented by the library's Director, Dr. Friedrich Geisselmann. Dr. Arend Flemming, Director of the Public Libraries of the City of Dresden, enthusiastically praised the German Internet Library and the know-how of individual networking librarians. However, in his paper he frankly admitted the difficulties that a federal system like Germany poses to a national project in the public library sector. The international visitors showed little understanding of the German domestic problems regarding the German Internet Library. Instead, they demonstrated enthusiasm for and keen interest in the project.

During his presentation of the German National Library of Science and Technology and the related basic sciences of architecture, chemistry, computing, mathematics and physics, Uwe Rosemann, Director of the German National Library of Science and Technology (TIB) Hannover, particularly emphasized their cooperative ventures and networking activities. As a result of the financial hardship of scientific libraries

following world war II, the system of national information supply has safeguarded its principles of cooperative acquisition and provision up to the present time, and has meanwhile internationally expanded its cooperative ventures, for instance, via subito und vascoda. Finally, Dr. Michael Mönnich, Vice Director of the University Library Karlsruhe, introduced the Karlsruhe Virtual Catalogue (KVK), another specific example of an innovative German online service.

But there is no free access to information without a discussion on rights and licenses. The second day of the conference was dedicated to precisely that topic, with particular emphasis on digitized information. Prof. Dr. Gabriele Beger, Director of the State and University Library Hamburg and eminent specialist in the field of libraries and copyright, introduced the coalition for action “Copyright for Education and Research”, and dealt with legal issues concerning multimedia. Ute Schwens, Director of the German National Library in Frankfurt am Main, named the digital legal deposit privilege as a further basis for free access to information and explained the background to the standing order for electronic publications, a result of the coming into force of the law regarding the German National Library in June 2006. Henceforth, any types of publication published exclusively online are to be collected, indexed, and made available, comparable to the conventional media so far collected on the basis of the legal deposit privilege. Schwens vividly described the required preparations for and the extent of this venture including all its legal, technical and logistical implications. The paper of Dr. Norbert Lossau, Director of the Lower Saxony State and University Library Göttingen, concluded the session presenting open access initiatives like SPARC.

Alex Byrne, IFLA President until August 2007, had joined the conference from Australia. He recalled the World Trade Centre Attack in New York, and illustrated the close proximity of explosive political topics, the supply of information and the task of libraries to guarantee free access to information for everybody, as well as demonstrating the fragile nature of the freedom of information and expression. This clearly underpins the significance and the commitment of an international library federation like IFLA. The commitment to advocate free access to information is one of IFLA's core activities laid down in their manifesto – hence the committed performance of libraries during the first World Information Summit, phase I of which took place in Geneva in 2003, phase II in Tunis. In his paper, Byrne made reference to those among various other IFLA activities, and made an appeal to all libraries to actively contribute to shaping a fair and comprehensive information society.

Bob McKee, Chairman of the Governing Board of the British institution CILIP (The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) and actively committed IFLA member, reported on a special facet of IFLA's work, the FAIFE activities. FAIFE stands for 'Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression'. By means of publications, national reports, lobbying activities and carefully directed statements and resolutions FAIFE responds to censorship and violations of the freedom of access to information. The work of FAIFE is based on Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". There couldn't be a more explicit foundation for our profession's socio-political responsibility.

„Libraries on the Agenda“ is the presidential theme of Prof. Dr. Claudia Lux³. It is her aim to move libraries closer into the focus of political decision making and to grant them a position in social life which, to be sure, they frequently already occupy, but which, equally frequently, has been denied by public awareness. In other words, the potential of libraries to contribute to a solution to social problems is available, but often times our society or her representatives do not make use of it. The motto „Libraries on the Agenda“ is designed to trigger a change to this effect, and to move libraries closer to the centre of social debate and responsibility. Librarians are called upon to demonstrate more self-confidence and active commitment, and are urged to consciously participate in a diversity of activities, not least in order to make it more difficult for politicians to relegate libraries to the one-sided drawer of culture and education. City planning, economic development, health politics, and migration politics are among the areas which can benefit enormously from their local libraries. Prof. Dr. Lux points out options for lobbying work, illustrates possible strategies, and demonstrates that the intervention of libraries has already reached far beyond regional and national borders in the pursuit of international strategies – thanks to IFLA and the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations EBLIDA.

Over and over again she addresses librarians as those primarily involved: „... We should no longer just talk about our hopes. We should become experts and make demands ... Our own personal action alone will make it happen – nobody else will do the job for us“. She speaks about lobbying activities, the choice of adequate themes, and the

³ For information on the theme „Libraries on the Agenda“ please see http://www.ifla-deutschland.de/de/ifla_praesidentschaft/motto.html

importance of strong image building for libraries through marketing strategies. And she certainly does not remain stuck in abstract thought or wishful thinking. Rather, she describes suitable methods to successfully reach her aim. Her examples tangibly illustrate her ideas, and her arguments are designed for libraries to make themselves heard at various levels – it all amounts to a manual which the president-elect would like to see drawn up and compiled by the end of her presidential term.⁴ One step towards this goal is the common declaration on free access to information passed at the end of the two-day conference: „The participants from 26 countries at this first Presidential Meeting in Berlin, 18-19 January 2007, reaffirm the vital importance of libraries in promoting freedom, equity and inclusion through free access to information and call upon governments to put libraries on the agenda to support these goals”.

Given the libraries’ political stance and the socially explosive topic of free access to information – it goes without saying that not only librarians but their political decision makers, too, have joined the discussion. Thanks to the support of the German Foreign Office, the Federal Union of German Library and Information Associations (BID), Library Information International (BII), the Goethe-Institut as well as the SECCO Pontanova-Foundation, it had been possible to invite altogether 24 colleagues, both librarians and their political decision makers (ministerial members or speakers from expert bodies of cultural and educational policy), from 14 Eastern Europe Countries. Eastern Europe was the focal point of this year’s first presidential meeting. Due to the concentrated negotiations and intensive efforts made by library and information professionals of

⁴ A copy of this paper by Prof. Dr. Claudia Lux as well as of any of the other speakers is available at the German IFLA website: http://www.ifla-deutschland.de/de/ifla_praesidentschaft/programm_2007.html

local Goethe Instituts in Eastern Europe Countries with the aim to establish contacts, it had been possible for committed colleagues networking with great competence in their respective countries to be invited to Germany. Be it Albania, Poland, Romania, Macedonia, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia or the Czech Republic – the list of countries represented was as extensive as their representatives were impressive. The Vice Minister of the Ministry of Culture and Education was present just like presidents of national library associations, directors of important libraries, heads of departments, and advisors. What they shared was their enormous openness and their willingness to engage in discussion.

After all, the opportunity does not present itself very often that both librarians and politicians can spend an entire week together in order to intensely discuss a theme, and to take the rich input and a wealth of experience away with them. Before the first presidential meeting started in Berlin on January 18, the guests from Eastern Europe had the chance to form an idea of German libraries and their options to access information. A study excursion took them to libraries in Leipzig (University Library Leipzig, German National Library), Dresden (State and University Library Dresden, Public Libraries of the City of Dresden) and Cottbus (Centre of Information, Communication and Media Centre of the Technical University Cottbus). A visit to the Berlin State Library building in Potsdamer Strasse and its new year's reception was included in the programme.

The personal mark that the often impressive library buildings and their technical equipment left on the visitors achieved the desired effect. Still more significant, however, were the excellent opportunities for exchange,

the possibilities for guests to put their questions before their German colleagues and to present their own experiences following the excursion. The make-up of the group was unique: Some guests had never been to Germany before, others used their time to reinforce contacts with political decision makers from their own countries or to compare them to those of other nations. Some politicians first visited German libraries before they returned home - filled with good intentions -, and had a closer look at the libraries in their home countries. The exchange and the contacts took place between the guests from Germany and those from Eastern Europe as well as among the members of the invited group.

The discussion will continue, and the second presidential meeting is planned for February 2008. "Should we expect another storm like this next year?" I promptly answered the question of the Australian Alex Byrne: "Hardly another storm like this, but rather a seismic discussion...".

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