

The third IFLA presidential meeting in Berlin showed that IFLA's slogan "Libraries United Globally" is not a dead letter. This meeting was indeed the place for contacts and share between Europe and many Arabic and Asian invited countries.

The topic in discussion was this year the access to knowledge via networking libraries, and the worldwide scope has led to a cultural mix inside the German Foreign Office which kindly hosted the event.

Moreover, the IFLA's president turnover in backdrop (as German Chairman Dr. Claudia Lux will give way to Ms. Ellen Tise from South Africa this year) gave a symbolic sense and range to this venue. The speech of the president elect was full of hope and humanity, focusing on simplicity. She also stressed the transfer of best practices to developing countries, where libraries have a cultural role like everywhere, but with urgency.

As a French student from a North American University (Université de Montréal), I faced a complete and interesting change of scene. My trip to Berlin was motivated by a research opportunity brought by one of my professors in Montreal, Pr. Réjean Savard, who offered me the opportunity to study German library system and cooperation network. In this context, the third IFLA's presidential meeting was a great starting point.

The many German panelists confirmed one of my first impressions about German library system: a certain complexity brought by the federal political structure. However, this complexity is a great challenge for any kind of library in Germany, and gives a strategic sense to cooperation. Germany is a real leader and motor in the field of library science, through its expertise in digitization or its commitment to European cooperation. The Foundation Conference of European National Librarians, leading the European Library project, is currently chaired by the German National Library Director Dr. Elisabeth Niggemann.

Invited panelists from Arabic and Asian countries described a contrasting picture of their library systems, from the astonishing Malay example and its developed and modern local libraries network, to the moving and scary situation in the Palestinian territories. The latest is not that surprising, but hearing the own Palestinian official words is something we rarely experience here in Western Countries.



From left to right : Jérémie Pernet; Khaled Al Dhaheer, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH); Claudia Lux, IFLA's President; Réjean Savard, Montreal University; Trine Kolderup-Flaten, Library of Bergen (Norway).

As French, I have to admit that the absence of French speakers in the panel and even in the crowd surprised me. In my opinion, the well known cooperation between France and Germany in the European context, but also the many partnerships between France and its ex-colonies (Algeria, Lebanon...) would have made worth a French representation.

Regarding the outputs of this conference, the different testimonies have shown that beyond cultural matters, libraries and their dedicated workers have to deal with politics aspects which are not easy to face. Library is never mandatory until it becomes politics. This statement could sum up the ideas of many library actors, all around the world. Here again, cooperation as a strengthening strategy seems to be the answer, but only if particular

cultural issues and needs are understood and taken into account.

This Presidential Meeting I was glad to attend has shown that IFLA, as a global organization, knows that diversity and openness are not meaningless concepts but strong basics for cultural associations. To go further, this event made me think that students have their role to play in this context. Indeed, IFLA's network could be a good stepping stone for us to share our skills and youth with developing countries but could also bring to Europe or North America a different and valuable point of view from other cultures.

The few actors of the German library system I had the chance to meet for this research gave me different viewpoints about national, European and international library cooperation. Indeed, we selected librarians and managers from the Berlin Free University Library, the library school in Humboldt University, the Berlin State Library and the National German Library in order to collect their experiences, expectations and ideas about this topic. The analysis of the information gathered will enable us to understand the system as it currently is but will also hopefully give us the chance to stress the key challenges and future developments of networking libraries in the German context.

To finish, I would like to thank Professor Réjean Savard and the International Relations department from Montreal's University, the Goethe-Institute in Montreal and the International Cooperation department of the German Library Association for this nice trip and the research opportunity in the Continent.

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