

## IFLA-Konferenz 2002 Glasgow / Closing Ceremony

### Invitation to IFLA 2003 in Berlin

Georg Ruppelt

Madam President, Secretary General, dear colleagues,

first of all I would like to congratulate the colleagues from Glasgow and the IFLA officials on this marvellous conference, here in Glasgow. You have promoted libraries world-wide and their important responsibilities / tasks. But you have also given those colleagues, who are working in the libraries for citizens of all ranks and ages in many countries, important motivation for their jobs.

Please allow me to briefly introduce myself: My name is Georg Ruppelt. I am the president / chairman of the National Committee for the Organisation of IFLA 2003 Berlin and librarian of the Lower Saxony State Library in Hannover.

You, my dear colleagues, are still full of enthusiasm and pleased by this wonderful conference in Glasgow. But probably you are as well a bit sad that this conference is now coming to an end. This, I understand well. But to reduce some of your sadness I would like to ask you to have a glimpse into the future. More precisely to the beginning of August next year. From 1<sup>st</sup> August to 9<sup>th</sup> August the IFLA Conference will take place in Berlin and today it is my great honour and pleasure to invite you all to this conference.

The Berlin IFLA Conference has the interesting topic: „Access Point Library: Media – Information – Culture“. This is a wonderful topic that embraces the diverse tasks of libraries in its most concise form – tasks that concern the past as well as the future.

The German translation of the motto: „Bibliothek als Portal“ means „Library as a portal“. Door, gate and portal are synonyms for entrance, passage: portal especially means a monumentally shaped entrance. In my view it is a very appealing image that has been used recently in earlier, pre-digital times to label libraries in the sense of a gate to the world of knowledge. Moreover, the use of the term „portal“ in our times gives varied interpretations to this image. By evoking associations to a web presence it also takes into account the daily practise of many scientific and public libraries all over the world.

Please allow me to stick to this image of the library as a door, gate or portal to the world of knowledge and information and let me add another image. At doors, gates and passages in ancient Rome one could often find the God of local and temporal entry: The double-faced Janus. Janus symbolised the local and temporal passage, lately the one from past to future. By this image the tasks of our libraries are specified in their entirety. On the one hand, libraries

should look into the future and make use of the latest information technology in order to supply the people we are serving with the latest information. On the other hand it is your task to preserve the treasures of science and culture that have been accumulated in the past and to make it accessible to future generations on that they can base upon these treasures of the past.

In Berlin, my dear colleagues, when you are visiting the libraries you will come upon a tremendous treasure of knowledge and cultures of the past. But you will also experience that the Berlin libraries take up the challenges of the present and future.

Two more tasks can be described by this image of the double-faced Janus. Libraries in their entirety not only have to satisfy the needs of a highly specialised science but also have to take care that the cultural achievement of reading is not only left to a part of humanity. Much more it is your duty to spread this achievement. If we now slightly change the Janus' line of sight, we will see that libraries have the task to look up to the starry sky of scientific research. Furthermore, you have to task not to be out of touch with reality but to keep supporting the never-ending task that is the basis of any human culture and science: the support of language. Language is the most human feature of all. Language is what distinguishes us most from other living things. Faithful to the sense of meaning, the South African Nobel prize-winner of literature, Nadine Gordimer, once put it like this: „What makes a man a man, is not the upright walking or a stick to dig for food or to fight, but the language.“

Dear colleagues, the image of Janus also applies to the big city of Berlin where the IFLA Conference next year will be held. In Roman mythology Janus is looking with a saddened expression into one direction and with a happy expression into the other direction. In this wonderful city of Berlin, where we will hopefully see each other again safe and sound, Janus is looking upon the past with a quite saddened expression. At many places in Berlin one will be reminded of the highlights of German history of ideas and history of civilisation. But one will be confronted as well with the low points of the German past.

Today, this since 1990 re-united city is a varied, turbulent and often joyful metropolis that opens its doors and gates widely to welcome guests from all over the world. As you may know Berlin applied to become a venue for the Olympic Games. As you may also know, this failed. Instead, Berlin has had the luck to get something equally good if not better: the IFLA Conference !

I wish you all a pleasant and safe journey home. I wish all of you healthy and happy months between the IFLA Conferences and I am looking forward to see you and many of your colleagues next year in Berlin.

Bye bye Glasgow, hello Berlin!