

## „IFLA goes Germany“

Im Gespräch mit B.I.T.online-Chefredakteur Rafael Ball: Ellen R. Tise, Senior Director, Library and Information Service Stellenbosch University, South Africa, IFLA-Präsidentin von 2009–2011

*Ellen Tise, thank you very much for coming. It's a great pleasure for us having you here in the interview. You are the IFLA president and you come from South Africa. Our readers are very interested to hear, what kind of new trends, new strategies you have seen in librarianship around the world. Are there many similarities in terms of challenges and problems being faced, or are there very different solutions and ideas in the various countries? Have you come across any special trendsetters? We are very interested to hear about this.*

Thank you very much for having me. Yes, as the IFLA president, my term ends in August this year at the IFLA conference in Puerto Rico, I have had the great privilege of being exposed to so many countries and regions (throughout the world). I would also like to mention, that in addition to IFLA president, I am the senior director of the library information service at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. My personal background and 25 year career have mostly been in university libraries, yet through the library association in South Africa as well as through the IFLA, I have had the opportunity to visit many libraries including school libraries and public libraries and so on.

So to answer the question regarding what my observations are about new trends or challenges facing libraries all over the world, I am probably not in the position to really speak for all parts of the world, but certainly the ones where I have been over the last three and a half years. I have seen the major impact, as is well known, that information technology has had on libraries and how libraries have had to change, how libraries have had to insure that they stay up-to-date. Many people see the internet and issues like Google books in the US and how that has actually made people more aware of the probable change in terms of the access to information taking place at libraries.

That is probably the key thing. As a greater abundance of information becomes more



widely available in different forms, through different information providers, more people want to have access to it because in today's society, so much revolves around knowledge and information. Therefore, libraries were founded under the principle of providing access to knowledge and information, as far as possible equal access, in order to empower people and enable them to develop. As a result of the changes taking place and historical differences which exist in different parts of the world, there is, in some places, an unequal balance in terms of who has control over the information and thus, it has become a commodity, making it often more expensive to access certain types of information. Those are the key challenges in terms of what the internet has brought us, what Google has brought us. Therefore, libraries, due to these financial implications cannot afford to acquire and make available everything that users require nowadays.

On the one hand it's the issue surrounding access, which libraries all over the world seem to be facing. On the other hand, of course, are the terms preservation and insurance. There is a lot of information that has

been produced over the last ten years but it has been produced in forms and formats that are instantaneous like social media. We see the impact of twitter and blogs; take, for instance, what has been happening recently in the Middle East, all that information is instantly processed and accessible. So now, one of the biggest challenges that libraries face, is how to capture and collect this information because, in essence, it has to be collected.

*Ellen, do you see any different trends among the different countries? For example in the US, the Scandinavian countries, or the Eastern part of Asia? Any trendsetter regions which currently fulfill these things you just formulated in a better way than other countries or which organizes the access better or which have better financial systems? Or do you think this is a very similar problem all over the world?*

I think it is a very similar problem all over the world. Because we are all facing this challenge, in terms of being able to afford, as we have in the past, everything that

we could possibly wish to make available through our libraries. But now information is being collected all over the place. It's not simply go, and, you know, the book will physically be there at the library. Nevertheless, there are some differences between countries and the amount of government and institutional funding allocated to libraries. They recognize the value and public good that libraries still provide, and therefore, if you want to have equal access, you know not free but equal access, and the freedom to be able to access information, then there needs to be funding, and unfortunately, libraries in some parts of the world receive more funding than others.

Also, the goal of many libraries now is to change the spaces in which they provide the information. They don't simply dedicate a lot of funding to purchasing printed material. I know, for example, in the US, the university libraries no longer buy books for the sake of adding to the collection, but rather make purchases according to the current demand. They then invest more in developing tools and ways to access the information. They wish to provide more spaces, flexible spaces in the library which can accommodate the new learning and research needs of the users. Working collaboratively with the users is very important. The goal is, of course, to constantly update the online access and add more tools as they develop, basically to avoid becoming static.

Some libraries, in some parts of the world, are much more advanced in terms of that, for example in Scandinavia. I have been to a couple places in Asia, and the major trend there is that more and more libraries are investing in ebooks, and no longer focusing so much on print books. This is an issue that everyone faces, as we provide more access to electronic information, we must also deal with the ramifications of licensing and copyright laws and so on. This is where an organization like IFLA plays a major role and we have recently launched two new major initiatives to combat these issues. One deals with exceptions and limitations of copyright laws, in which we will be seeking a treaty that will be discussed now. The other initiative promotes open access as a new tool to make more scientific information available.

*Coming back to your own country and your own experience in your own library; we have heard that there are very interesting projects going on there. Can you tell us something about projects which you have tried as director in your own library?*

Yes, linking up with my previous comments, libraries have to provide more collaborative spaces. Many libraries are now moving their stock of books and journals into storage and creating new, inviting and vibrant spaces in the library. So we at Stellenbosch University opened two new facilities in our library. The first one is a learning center where we have integrated discussion rooms, multimedia workstations with iPads and computers where students can still download



software and any free content music. We are also bringing in more ebook readers and even have an art room where students can do painting and designing. The students decide. We have a system of communication which allows the students, mainly undergraduates, to decide how to use the space. Within a two month period we had 62,000 visitors to this one facility. We have also recently opened a new research center. I know that this trend has also been popular in Australia and other places as a way to prepare for the future and provide interactive learning and research spaces.

Some people have said that it looks like an airport lounge. It doesn't look like a library. The design is sophisticated, but it allows, again, for individual study – we have interactive writing boards, we have spaces where students can also work in groups, and they can practice presentations. We have projectors, we have coffee machines. Students can relax and access the outside garden. It is noteworthy that people have not only commented positively on the facilities, but also on the philosophy behind these new spaces. It's about providing creative spaces, and also creating new knowledge and providing access to that knowledge. We collaborate with many other divisions at the university. We hold workshops. We developed a writing center which provides a variety of services, for example, help with research proposals, counseling services, statistical analysis services and advising on theses and dissertations. We plan to incor-

porate more and more students, e.g. PHD-students that are helping other PHD-students. We have video conferencing, which allows them to interact with other groups, in the other libraries, all over the world. The fundamental philosophy here is to provide a wide range of support services. We also work closely with publishers and entrepreneurs because we realized that the library has to do much more than just provide access to information and spaces where knowledge can be acquired. Students need more than that. They need to know things like the latest search techniques and how to publish in a world class journal. So we also work in collaboration with a variety of external partners such as Elsevier. We have an Elsevier week, where we make people aware of the different databases for their particular subjects, career workshops and so on. The professors at our university really appreciated this, and they said that through these initiatives and the research centers that I mentioned earlier, we have shown how much more value the library actually adds. And they really see us as a strategic partner at the university.

*Ellen, that's wonderful and very modern. Thank you very much. The last question, if you would allow? You are here in Germany at the 100th anniversary library conference. Is it your first time being here? What kind of impressions have you had here at the Deutsche Bibliothekartag?*

Well, I arrived yesterday, it is the first time that I've attended the annual congress, and it's wonderful to be here at the Centennial celebration. I learned yesterday it is the second largest librarians conference in the world, bigger than some of our IFLA congresses. It is very special because German libraries and librarians have played a leading role in the development of libraries and I think, from an international perspective, has left a major mark all over the world. Since my arrival there has been a lot of excitement and I have taken part in some great discussions. Unfortunately I won't be able to attend all of the panel discussions because I have to leave tomorrow. I am looking forward to the dedication of the German colleagues and to learning more about the developments here. And then of course, to making sure that German librarians continue to be very active in the IFLA. *(Laughs)*

*Thank you very much. I hope you have a nice stay here in Berlin and that you enjoy the conference.*