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## **The History of IFLA as a Research Theme: Challenge and Commitment**

### *The Theme*

In 1987 IFLA celebrated the 60th anniversary of its foundation. Such a jubilee should induce us to consider the history of the organization and, through an analysis of its development over six decades, to stimulate its present and future development.

The history of IFLA has hitherto only been researched and publicized in broad outline and trends of development. Meritorious publications such as *IFLA's First Fifty Years*<sup>1</sup>, published in 1977 on IFLA's golden jubilee, and the contributions by Peter Havard-Williams<sup>2</sup>, Serpil de Costa<sup>3</sup>, Robert Vosper<sup>4</sup>, Frances Laverne Carrolls<sup>5,6</sup>, and Margreet Wijnstroom<sup>7,8</sup> are no more (but also no less) than valuable contributions to a comprehensive description of the development of IFLA from 1927 to the present day, a comprehensive description of which is still lacking today.

Such a research project should be both a challenge and a commitment, and should be tackled as a collective project: the Round Table on Library History should convey suggestions and proposals in this connection to the Executive Board of IFLA. IFLA should, in brief, pay more attention than hitherto to its own history, for who else should do this?

On the basis of a research project which I began in the past year "The Development of IFLA after the Second World War with Particular Reference to the Cooperation of the Socialist Countries and Relations with Unesco", I would like to make some remarks on the development stages of IFLA, and for this purpose have selected some individual years.

### *The Year of Foundation – 1927*

Much has been written about the establishment of IFLA: during the closing session of the annual conference of the Library Association in Edinburgh the representatives of 15 national library associations signed a resolution dealing with the establishment of an "International Library and Bibliographical Committee". This was the successful culmination of decades of endeavour by librarians from various countries who were particularly interested in international cooperation; an international organization had finally seen the light of day, and in 1929 it adopted the present name of IFLA.

It was certainly no coincidence that the 50th Anniversary Conference of the Library Association was the place where IFLA was founded; after all our hosts at this annual IFLA meeting constitute the second-oldest library association in the world, and which, until this day, has been deeply committed to international work. Sixty years of IFLA mean at the same time 110 years of the Library Association: our congratulations to our British colleagues! A decisive factor in the establishment of IFLA was undoubtedly the general political climate after the First



World War, a climate marked by the foundation of the League of Nations (1919), its International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation (active from 1922), and the establishment of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (opened in Paris in January 1926). International cooperation, the exchange of opinions and ideas, was the precept of the day; people felt that they had learned the right lesson from World War I, and set the aim of creating a favourable atmosphere for the peaceful solution of international problems by way of science and the arts.

In its early period IFLA was mainly a European/North American affair. Guests from other parts of the world were rare. Membership grew slowly, but ten years after its foundation IFLA comprised 35 national associations from 25 countries. The tone was set by representatives of the national libraries and university libraries; it was only in 1932 that public libraries were hesitantly drawn into IFLA work with the establishment of a sub-committee. As a rule, only the official delegates of the member associations came together, seldom more than 50 in number. The Second World War interrupted the development of IFLA, just as it did all other forms of international cooperation. It was an irony of fate that the last IFLA Conference in July 1939 was held in the Peace Palace in The Hague, and that the 3rd World Congress of Libraries and Bibliography was scheduled to take place in 1940 in Nazi Germany.

#### *The Year of the New Start – 1947*

Two years after the end of World War II – which also damaged many libraries irreparably – 52 delegates from 18 countries met in Oslo to take stock and to revive IFLA. The first preliminary steps in this direction had been taken in 1946, and this work had been facilitated by the fact that the President, M. Godet and the Secretary, A. C. Breycha-Vauthier (Librarian of the League of Nations and from 1946 head of the UNO library in Geneva) had been able to maintain a minimum of contact from Switzerland with members during World War II.

Decisive for the IFLA meeting in Oslo was the signature of an agreement with Unesco. This special organization of the United Nations for education, science and culture had only been officially established in November 1946, when it had immediately begun to establish contact with the most important non-governmental international organizations in its field. IFLA was one such organization, and the delegates greeted with great approval the draft agreement presented by E. J. Carter, counsellor for libraries and museums of the Unesco Secretariat in Paris. This laid the foundation for the close cooperation between IFLA and Unesco for more than 40 years, the importance of which must be repeatedly emphasized today.

The agenda for the IFLA meeting in Oslo included, apart from the election of a new president, the reorganization of the sub-committees of the association, of which there were now 13. During the discussion the question was raised of a separate sub-committee on library work with children, but despite considerable vocal support a further eight years were to pass until these efforts were crowned with success.

The year 1947 represented a new start, and even four decades ago it was clear to many libraries: "There was no possibility of just turning the page and continuing our business where we left in 1939. We had to redefine our goals, our terms of reference, our motivation."<sup>9</sup> This was doubtless a correct assessment, though a closer study of IFLA in those years gives the impression that rather a phase of reconstruction had set in, particularly since the number of members increased only slowly and the old structures and modes of work were retained. A typical example here was the Eurocentricism of IFLA, indicated by the fact that until 1967 all IFLA meetings were held in Europe.

#### *A "Normal" IFLA Year – 1967*

In 1967 the first IFLA Conference was held outside Europe; Toronto, the Canadian industrial centre and university city could welcome over 300 participants. For the second time a general theme had been chosen for the occasion: "Library Service for a Nation Covering a Large Geographical Area", and this was the theme not only for the plenary sessions but also for the open meetings of the Sections and committees. A total of 33 delegates came from the socialist countries, including two from the German Democratic Republic; our library association joined IFLA in 1964, the year of its foundation. At this time IFLA comprised 86 associations and 88 associate members (libraries) – this new category had been introduced with the revised statutes of 1964.

The growth of the organization made changes in the mode of work necessary, among them the establishment of a permanent Secretariat (1962), the publication of the information bulletin "IFLA News" (also 1962), and in particular the beginning of longer-term planning of IFLA work. 1963 saw the publication of "Libraries in the World", a long-term plan of IFLA which, until the middle of the 1970s, represented the programmatic basis of the Federation, which was on its way to becoming a world organization. For the first time the attempt was made to integrate the problems of library work in overall socio-political developments and connections, and to describe the most important fields of activity.

Library planning had in general become one of the themes for librarians, decisively influenced by the work of Carlos Victor Penna, who became widely known at the latest in 1967 through his article in the *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries*<sup>10</sup>. Penna was the official representative of Unesco at the IFLA meeting in Toronto, where he depicted the new stage in the development of Unesco which, for instance, led to the establishment of a Department of Documentation, Libraries and Archives, and important fields of work: library planning, standardization and coordinated training. At the same time emphasis was placed on the necessity for closer cooperation between IFLA and the two other NGOs (non-governmental organizations), FID and ICA. It was in 1967 that Unesco twice invited the secretaries and presidents of the NGOs to Paris for discussions. One of the suggestions made was that representatives of the three organizations should be appointed to the newly-founded International Advisory Committee on Documentation, Libraries and Archives – IACODLA. The committee commenced its activities in autumn 1967 and, parallel to this, work began on the



UNISIST programme with the establishment of the Unesco/ICSU Central Committee on the Feasibility of a World Science Information System.

By 1967 the necessity was becoming apparent for a new and fundamental revision of the programmes, the structure and the mode of work of IFLA. With the transition to the 1970s this led to the formation of a Programme Development Group (1969), the establishment of a permanent Secretariat run by Margreet Wijnstroom in The Hague (1971), and the holding of the first IFLA/ Unesco seminar for librarians from developing countries in Liverpool (also in 1971).

### *The "Golden" IFLA Jubilee – 1977*

The 50th anniversary of the foundation of IFLA was a welcome opportunity to hold a "World Congress of Librarians" in Brussels in 1977, the fourth such congress since 1927. World Congresses had previously been held in Rome, Florence and Venice (1929), Madrid and Barcelona (1934) and Brussels (1955). The repetition of such a congress in the Belgian capital was mainly aimed at demonstrating the multifold relations between librarianship and education, science and culture. An interesting programme had been carefully prepared, and both prominent guests and the public invited. More than 1700 people came together for the general theme "Libraries for All: One World of Information, Culture and Learning"<sup>11</sup>, and received an impression of the "Challenge of the Future" – the motto of the closing session.

IFLA had been well prepared for its jubilee year: after protracted and sometimes very controversial discussions a new statute was adopted in 1976. Important alterations were the introduction of voting rights for institutional members, the new structure of IFLA with its Sections as fundamental units and their elected Standing Committees as basic groups, the establishment of Divisions and the formation of a Professional Board. The new Standing Committees met for the first time in Brussels and discussed their tasks in implementing the Medium-Term Programme for 1976–1980, which had been submitted in January 1976 by the Programme Development Group (PDG) of IFLA headed by C. Reedijk. UBC had been joined by a new and inclusive programme – UAP (Universal Availability of Publications). The members from 102 countries – now 800 in number – could now be kept better informed on the development of their Federation, thanks to the establishment of a new periodical *IFLA Journal*. IFLA had begun its march to new horizons, self-confident and optimistic and ready for the future.

1977 was also a year of important changes and re-structuring in the Unesco framework. At the 19th General Conference in Nairobi in autumn 1976 Director-General M'Bow had submitted a report which explained at length the necessity of coordinating all activities in the field of information. The parallel development of the UNISIST programme (adopted in 1971) and NATIS (adopted in 1974) had led to duplication of work and to confusion everywhere, particularly in the Member States. Thus the establishment of the General Information Programme (PGI) of Unesco was also welcomed by IFLA: at the same time hard proposals were made for further cooperation.

Thus 1977 was a successful year in the history of IFLA and Unesco. What are the prospects 10 years later?

### *IFLA (and Unesco) in Crisis? – 1987*

In the year which marks the 60th anniversary of IFLA, librarians from all over the world came together in Brighton, well-known seaside resort and conference centre. The general theme of the 53rd Council and General Conference was "Libraries and Information Services in a Changing World". The professional programme announced – the plenary sessions, meetings of the Divisions, Sections and Round Tables, visits and exhibitions – gave promise, as did the cultural and social framework arranged by the British hosts, for an interesting and useful exchange of ideas, opinions and experiences on the present and the future of library and information work. It becomes increasingly plain that professional discussion takes place in the field of tension between two poles: on one hand the utilization of modern technologies, and on the other hand the collection and preservation of the cultural heritage of humanity. Libraries and librarians must master both tasks; it is not a question of either/or, but of both this and that.

In the run-up to this IFLA meeting, a "brainstorming session" was held in The Hague, to which Hans-Peter Geh, IFLA President, had invited a Working Group. This was devoted to the structure, organization and management of the professional activities of IFLA. Subjects dealt with included the core programmes, the tasks of the Divisions, Sections and Round Tables, the role of the Professional Board, and above all financial questions. The report on this meeting begins with the statement that IFLA is in a certain state of crisis: "The expertise is there, but the money to meet the needs of modern librarianship is not there.". Questions of financing have always played a decisive role in the organization of the professional work of IFLA, but today such questions present themselves more sharply than ever before. This is due to the fact of IFLA's nature as a world organization with more than 1200 members in 124 countries, and to the growing interconnection and complexity of library and information work. It is certainly necessary to examine seriously once and again the tasks, the structures and the modes of work, but the baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater – that is to say that reliable, past experiences should not be ignored in the search for something new. In Unesco too there is talk of a crisis as the expression of a worldwide crisis in international multilateral relations, which makes its appearance in particular in the system of the United Nations. Here we have reached the basic questions of the future coexistence of humanity, and the necessity of new modes of thought in the nuclear age. International relations, at all levels and in all fields, demand a humanization, and real confidence between the partners in West and East, North and South. All of us can make a contribution to this, naturally with our specific means and opportunities, "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations", as the Constitution of Unesco states. IFLA will be well advised to continue to foster the cooperation with Unesco which has developed over four decades.

### *Concluding Remarks*

On these pages I have endeavoured to give some account of the history of development of IFLA, and to turn our consideration to the present and the future.



Occupation with the history of IFLA is a permanent challenge and obligation for every professional group of IFLA. This history should be written not only from the viewpoint of the Executive Board or the Secretary General, but also from the standpoint of the Sections and Round Tables, the member associations and institutions, and of former and present IFLA officers and participants in IFLA meetings. The history of IFLA is composed of many facets, from official reports to personal impressions. Developing consciousness of our own history helps us to solve the problems of today and tomorrow. I extend my personal congratulations to IFLA on its 60th birthday, and to the many enthusiasts who have made this organisation what it is today.

### References

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