

## A Prospective View on IFLA's Future

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Statutes are statutes. Every organization needs statutes, and sometimes even requires a revision of its statutes so as to bring them up-to-date and in line with reigning fashion, harmonize them with legislation, or make them conform to new activities. Statutes have, however, never by themselves constituted the force or vitality of an organization, nor yet impeded it. IFLA's old statutes have not checked its development, which it owed to the initiative and energy of some people particularly devoted to the Federation.

Set up as a professional association of librarians, IFLA found itself – almost against its will – a far-reaching venture, managing funds and people, in charge of projects undertaken on a world scale, and taking part in international activities relating to libraries. This growth has suddenly faced IFLA with new responsibilities to which its structure was not adapted. The question then arose whether the structure should be adapted to IFLA's objectives, or vice versa?

The adaptation of the structure to the objectives, and a re-examination of the latter in view of their coherence and compatibility with the available means was the double reply formulated in the *Medium-Term Programme*, a mixture of ambition and reason.

I – IFLA is a large body whose life depends on the activity of its members: sections, sub-sections, committees, working groups, etc.; if they do nothing, the Federation is dead. No initiative whatever taken at top level can revive a section that is not active. Some units produce tangible results, others do not. But the advantage of a grouping of librarians, national or international, lies in the fact that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The Federation is more than the sum of the work done by its sections and committees.

In IFLA's future this duality will become increasingly evident: the whole charged with missions of general interest, and the parts (sections) pursuing pin-point actions, more restricted and proper to their field of activity, though in some cases eventually taken up at the general level.

IFLA's missions can be defined in the terms of this statement. Whether they be general or specific, the activities of an organization like IFLA can be divided into two categories: On the one hand the information and self-regulating activities, aiming at developing good fellowship amongst its members and an adequate circulation of professional knowledge: discussions, conferences, visits, missions, scholarships, etc. They are important for the life of the organization for they help to strengthen the cohesion, but they are purely internal and can only produce self-satisfaction, friendship by feelings and, possibly, an improvement in everybody's work by means of exchanging friendly services. Very different are the actions

seeking to change the outside world and introduce in the information circuit a new mechanism or a new structure with the intention to improve it. These actions – be they of a political or technical nature – have a visible impact and bring progress to the library world.

**II – Four missions can be assigned to IFLA:**

- a) an information mission
- b) a political mission
- c) a long-term action mission
- d) a mission of specific activities.

a) Like all organizations, IFLA must serve as a link between its member associations, institutions, individuals . . . and ensure the circulation of all information on its activities and on those of the others: newsletters, journals, congresses, etc. are useful for this purpose. This mission can be improved. (Cf. hereafter).

b) IFLA must act as a Federation and publicly pronounce itself at international gatherings on behalf of librarians and libraries. It can cooperate, for instance, with Unesco or intervene with a government to defend or promote libraries. Its role is to be present wherever libraries or documentation are at issue, asserting with authority their place and function.

This mission can be associated with one of education and initiation. IFLA must be able to keep its member associations and individual librarians in their local difficulties by furnishing information, technical advice, give them the support they need or, should the occasion arise, by intervening cautiously with the responsible authorities. This function of technical adviser should be important in the future, though difficult to fund.

“Library Policy”. the philosophy of libraries, clearly defined or vaguely implied in IFLA’s action must indicate the evolution of present-day librarianship and influence library development in every country. Even if the standards of living vary, IFLA’s influence must be capable of making itself felt, little by little, in all countries, and determine a general library policy, a certain conception of the library’s nature, function and place in society.

This political conception of libraries ought to be the result of ample reflection on the part of IFLA Sections, and based on several facts characteristic of the twentieth century:

– World-wide dissemination of information is no longer a privilege of a small group of scholars who live in isolation, but a need of the masses, and the common responsibility of all countries. For research as for general reading we must think in world terms.

– Libraries can no longer remain aloof of the phenomenon “mechanization” and organization that enables all human institutions to survive. Mechanization and organization are the libraries’ only safeguards against the encroachment of documents and the multiplication of users.

– The traditional library is breaking up. New information supports proliferate and one asks oneself whether the utilization of the printed word will not sooner or later become obsolete. Up to now it is the privileged form, but will it always be the only one and will there not be (or are there already?) more flexible, safer forms, more practical for storing and transmitting information?

– In this age of rapid evolution, conservation becomes less important than transmission, to remember less important than to foresee. We are becoming active people and cease to be meditative. Memory ceases to be developed for the benefit of reflection. We are turning into active intelligences working with external memories. The libraries' role consists of making information available, not to store paper. Instead of concentrating on sterile conservation, libraries need to orientate themselves towards communication. That is why the distinction between libraries and documentation centres is bound to disappear.

c) From these facts can be easily deduced the third mission of IFLA: to foresee, undertake and pursue long-term universal actions aiming at the establishment of a mechanized network of information transfer. Often, these general projects appear to be mere big empty words, and their definition seems rather abstract in comparison with the everyday and unhappy reality libraries have to cope with. But a perspective is needed to make sense of various activities, apparently unrelated to each other, and to organize them into a coherent whole.

Some of these projects aim at creating institutions for international cooperation, others, for want of means, must be limited to the preparation of implementation only in the countries concerned. The UNISIST, UBC and UAP projects belong to the first category and conform to the first principle mentioned earlier.

Two programmes that belong to the second category should be developed, one pertaining to library mechanization, the use of better and better computers, the establishment of national and international networks, and the development of communication techniques, the other concerned with library planning and management.

These world-wide projects, i.e. actions undertaken by IFLA as a whole, will no doubt gain in importance in the years ahead, and lead to a certain centralism. Is this not essential for achieving greater efficiency?

d) Finally, specific actions. They are undertaken by Sections and correspond to the needs of a type of libraries or a type of activities. They are important and should not be neglected.

Sections dispose of limited means for these activities: annual meetings, goodwill, and sometimes contracts and subventions.

Without denying the interest of meetings and the papers presented there, which constitute an important source of information about the activities of IFLA members, and a means of exchanging or even inspiring new ideas, meetings do not in actual fact advance the Federation's work. Can a lecture of thirty minutes be called a subject study, and form a section's programme? Is there not disproportion

between the amplitude of certain themes, and the dearth of means and time afforded to them? This traditional (and very useful) method of work cannot be discarded, but we can try to make certain improvements:

- devote several meetings to a given theme, i.e. have it treated by several speakers, leave enough time for discussion, try to cover several aspects of the subject, and come to practical conclusions. This solution can in itself offer two possibilities:
- limit participation to a few experts who discuss a question in detail during two or three days;
- use the Round Table formula, with an exchange of views on a certain subject by a number of experts in front of an audience;
- set up smaller working groups that, meeting several times during the year, submit the result of their work to the Section's general assembly. This method, successfully employed in the past, deserves to be developed;
- create professional units with full-time staff for the execution of a project. The UBC Office is a good example of this;
- obtain contracts enabling one or more persons to undertake a study and present its result.

The first solution already brings an improvement compared with the present debates that are too short. It makes possible a more thorough discussion of new projects, but is not sufficient to accomplish the latter.

The other three solutions, and in fact all serious work, require both financial means and manpower.

The former can, possibly, be obtained from contracts concluded with Unesco or other funding bodies attending to the development of international relations, and particularly with national libraries, the natural knots in exchange networks, and therefore more directly concerned in international library cooperation.

One of the conditions for IFLA's success is to make every country admit that it cannot stay outside the world network of information and must bring its contribution to the edifice.

The means will, however, never be sufficient. IFLA's action must, therefore, be a double one: firstly, find funds, obtain the means needed for its projects, but, subsequently, adapt the latter to the money actually secured. If looking ahead is essential, taking a right view of things is not less so. The promotion or support of Utopian projects entailing a waste of human and financial resources should be avoided, and a proper measure maintained.

And what of the men?

We can at least hope that the new Statutes will infuse new blood into IFLA by the enrolment of individual members, the more active participation of institutional members, and more official commitment on the part of association members.

But enrolment procedures are not enough, the more so since certain habitués of the pleasant and unrestrained amateurism of the present conference will not care to be obliged to become personally involved in international activities.

The new Statutes have made a rather risky bet in asking from IFLA members more numerous activities. We must indeed be fully aware of the fact that the improved functioning of IFLA that we wish to achieve depends on increased individual involvement.

How many librarians, even though convinced of the usefulness of international work are ready to give, on a voluntary basis, more of their time to IFLA activities? How many of them, already fully occupied with the very heavy tasks inherent in their position, will be able to devote themselves to IFLA?

Is it not dangerous to count solely on the good will of individuals? The good will on which IFLA has been built constitutes a fragile foundation, even though it has never collapsed. But it could fail, all of a sudden, in certain sectors, making IFLA a colossus on clay feet.

This danger can be aggravated by increasing the political aspects of IFLA's activities. The Statutes allow for voting by country and the official registration of member associations in the Sections. It is not impossible that countries or associations would designate "official" representatives, ignorant about professional matters, and not specialists as in the past. In no circumstances should technical decisions be influenced by considerations of a political nature. In the past, the co-optation of specialists ensured the presence in the Sections of competent and active persons.

The bet can only be won on two conditions: by depending less on voluntary activities and instituting sounder financial structures; and by eliminating the influence of political factors in the affairs of IFLA. Human and financial problems converge here.

IFLA will become what its members make of it, for in the last resort it is on men that the successful application of the new Statutes will depend, on their capacity to promote certain ideas; on their expertise in certain domains (was it not the grouping of a number of first-rate experts that gave IFLA its present force?); on the way they take to heart certain international problems; on the importance they accord to the latter in their activities and their availability. Without everybody's acute awareness of the development of international relations and the inevitability of his personal involvement in them (voluntary or otherwise), IFLA cannot advance. As far as librarians are concerned, nationalism is dead.

It may be hoped that some keen minds will be capable of looking ahead beyond the immediate present and transform IFLA into a more powerful body, perhaps directing (on account of financial reasons) fewer projects but broader in scope, and all orientated towards library cooperation and the establishment of an international network for information transfer.