LIBRARIES FOR LIFE
democracy, diversity, delivery

IFLA Conference 2002, Glasgow

INGRID THOMSON

Public Relations Officer

Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), Western Cape Branch

I was very fortunate to be awarded the LIASA/EBSCO Travel Grant to attend the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Conference as a first time attendee in Glasgow in August 2002. The experience of being amongst approximately 4 700 delegates from all over the world was richly rewarding and stimulating - the conference programme was very varied and interesting - so much so, that it was actually very difficult to choose which presentations, discussions and sessions to attend. There were more than 122 exhibitors - and what a feast the 60 poster presentations provided!

Although the conference officially only started on Sunday, 18 August, the various standing committees and executive committees of the Round Tables had their business meetings on the Saturday which one could attend as an observer. This was a good opportunity to see IFLA in action and see what projects are on the go. (I think I can safely say that I had the whole IFLA experience!)

I followed a number of threads: that of university libraries and other general research libraries, management and marketing, user education and public libraries. (A number of the sections held joint sessions.) I also attended a couple of presentations made at the Africa session as well as Kay Raseroka's brainstorming session on her theme for her presidential period - *Bridging the Digital Divide*. Most of the papers are available on the web on the IFLA site *(http://www.ifla.org)* - follow the links to the 2002 Conference and click on programme. Invariably the questions and comments made after the presentations led to interesting discussions in which experiences were shared!

User education/information literacy was a big buzzword at the conference and was certainly a link between the different sections including that of public libraries. The message was strong and clear that learning to manage one's knowledge and being able to locate information was not just the preserve of the academic or school library, but a very important role of public libraries. Librarians, no matter the type of library, play an integral role in knowledge management.

Much of the business of the standing committees of university libraries and other general research libraries, and the executive committee of the Round Table for User Education revolved around information literacy, and the difficulties of becoming part of the curriculum - a common pattern throughout the world - and the plan to introduce something along the lines of an international driver's licence for information literacy. Public libraries play a major role in information literacy, for example, assisting people to update their information skills. The Round Table for User Education was to become a section called information literacy at the next conference in Berlin. There was a plea for national or institutional information literacy guidelines for all types of libraries to be emailed to the chair.

At the session, the marketing library services to academic communities discussion group, coined the term, *Personal knowledge management*, as an alternate to *Information literacy*. One of the questions asked was what would happen if libraries stopped Information literacy (or helping people manage their personal knowledge!). Much of what was discussed here, was raised again in the other sessions including public libraries, which only goes to show how vital user education is and how information makes a difference to people.

The other two user education sessions that I attended were one on *Developing librarians as teachers* and a workshop entitled *Becoming a librarian-teacher: what does it take?* Although the emphasis appeared to be on school and academic libraries, some of the questions applied to public libraries as well: 'What difference does my library

> *The message was strong and clear that learning to manage one's knowledge and being able to locate information was not just the preserve of the academic or school library, but a very important role of public libraries*

and its educational initiatives and programmes make to the lives of people? What are the differences, the tangible outcomes and benefits of my library? What evidence do you have?' The workshop focussed on what skills librarians are required to have to be effective teachers and the ways in which they acquired these skills within the context of the changing world of libraries and information; the kind of teaching that they currently do, the kind of teaching they will be doing, and how these skills could be acquired.

Public libraries

The Public libraries section had various sessions: the first one was titled *Democracy, delivery and diversity* (papers on the IFLA page) and the second was a discussion around *Public libraries and the democratic process.*

Several papers were presented in the first session, the first updating delegates on the *Public library section funded projects*; another on *Creating a public library role in the lifelong learning process*, and then a presentation on *Marketing the new (IFLA) public library guidelines*. Other papers presented looked at public libraries in the United Kingdom; and Martyn Wade of the Mitchell Library in Glasgow spoke about their Real learning centres. There were a couple of other papers, which I was not able to stay for, but I heard later that the Singaporean Public Library Service was amazing - they would buy up a floor of a shopping centre (because that is where the people congregate) and turn it into a library. (So libraries in shopping centres like Tygervalley are in line with trends in other countries.)

Especially fascinating was the paper on *Creating a public library role in the lifelong learning process* which is an IFLA project under the section of public libraries. The full paper is available on the IFLA website. The project explores the possibilities for public libraries to play a more active role in lifelong learning and to establish tools for libraries and librarians to become active partners in educational systems and selecting good practice examples. Some of the points the project will focus on and explore further are: the use of public libraries in work-related education and further education; the cooperation and communication with different educational institutions, trade and industry, health and environment; the role played in the defence and promotion of democratic participation, free access to information and freedom of speech; professional profile of the librarian regarding skills in information search, information and communication technology (ICT), et cetera; function of public libraries in the preservation and public presentation of cultural heritage; creation of electronic networks between public libraries and educational institutions and organisations; use of ICT in the libraries' work with lifelong learning; shape and design of reading rooms, work places; and the relationship between interior design and structure and an environment conducive to learning and education.

Jacqui Campbell of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) presented an overview of libraries in the United Kingdom (UK). Each local authority has to submit an annual library plan to central government. This plan reviews the performance of the previous year, includes a three year strategy, a detailed action plan including social inclusive planning, and the library is subject to independent assessment. Public library standards which include progress and targets, were introduced in 2001. There are 19 main standards which cover access, use, stock, user satisfaction. The libraries have three years to meet the standards and there are interventions for non-compliance. The UK government has a policy to look at whether services, not only libraries, provided by local authorities are the best value - these are continually reviewed and audited, and the best practices spread. Some funding for library projects comes from lottery money (Peoples Net, ICT training for librarians and digitisation projects) or from a challenge fund (Wolfson Fund) for special projects such as ICT, reader development or local history.

The strategic outcome of all this means that libraries enjoy a higher political profile as they are now higher on the local authorities' agenda as the annual plan has to be approved by council and submitted to the national government. It also means that resources have had to be reviewed so that the libraries can come in line with the public library standards. National government is focussing on e-government, social inclusion and lifelong learning - ICT is a core service and all libraries will have to be linked to the Internet (People's Network); reading promotions and campaigns are nationally coordinated and staff are trained for both ICT and the promotions.

Glasgow has a network of 33 community libraries and a mobile library service. To complement the traditional services, online learning and electronic research facilities are made available. One of its key services is providing a network of Real Learning Centres which offer multimedia PCs, online learning, tutor-led courses, adult learning opportunities and a range of software, CD-ROMs, DVDs and free access to the Internet. There is also a mobile Real Centre.

The second session was a very practical one, where as the facilitator, Barbara Ford of Chicago Public Library, said, the issues are universal, but there are different textures depending on the cultural factors. The discussion focussed on the meaning of democracy and the role of libraries in it. What it all boils down to is advocacy and marketing! Democracy can be seen in a narrow sense or in a wider sense - public libraries can unite all sectors without threatening other professions. In a multicultural society, do libraries play a bonding or a bridging role? And in what ways can libraries be more proactive? Several librarians spoke about strategies, projects and activities in their

In Chicago, specific areas were targeted, replacing bottle stores and drug hideouts with libraries which in turn brought 'legitimate' business concerns into the area resulting in improved economic conditions and upliftment for the community

➪
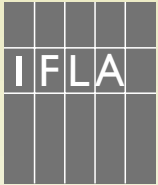
libraries that promoted democracy or were examples of democracy in action!

Some of the ideas were: write down your library's activities, how your institution interacts with its community, the services it provides - this forms the basis of one's action plan, and you'll be amazed when you see how much you actually are doing. Keep statistics. Then have a strategy in place to share this information and all the numbers with the mayor and the councillors and other strategic stakeholders. Stay abreast of the latest international trends and developments and send these articles to those stakeholders. The challenge was learning how to reach out to funders and decision makers as it was not clear how they perceived the library's role in democracy.

An example from Canada was focussing and promoting branch libraries as community builders for the advancement of economic development. A Swedish delegate suggested that one needed to look at teams that were important in the community such as those involved in economic development. In Chicago, specific areas were targeted, replacing bottle stores and drug hideouts with libraries which in turn brought 'legitimate' business concerns into the area resulting in improved economic conditions and upliftment for the community. And as a South African example, Library Business Corners got a mention!

Delegates also spoke about relationships between schools and public libraries. Chicago Public Library works closely with schools, as do libraries in Sweden. But nevertheless, concern was expressed about the lack of connections between the school and public libraries, and between the university and public libraries, as they seemed to operate in silos and forget that they are all part of the community.

Chicago Public Library had a *One city, one book* project which was also taking place in other libraries in the US. Together with schools, booksellers, radio and television stations, one particular title is chosen annually and all the citizens are encouraged to read it. The booksellers make sure they have sufficient copies, libraries make sure there are sufficient copies and the campaign is launched. One of the first books that formed part of this campaign was **To kill a mockingbird** by Harper Lee. One of the activities that formed part of the campaign was a mock trial set up by the Chicago Law Association.

In Wales, the libraries acted as 'one-stop shops' where they often interceded on behalf of patrons with the council. The library was seen as a village green. An Italian delegate suggested that the role of the library patrons be

explored; that one needed to get the users involved by inviting them to drop the mayor or the newspaper a line thanking the library for service. If a compliment was given in his library, the person was given pen, paper, an envelope and stamp to write the letter there and then!

The question that needed to be asked was: 'what information and what information skills does a 21st century citizen need?' All types of libraries have pieces of the puzzle and need to come together to arm our citizens with the knowledge and skills they need. Libraries need to look closely at their services and what they provide. They need to identify the groups they are not reaching.

Exhibitions

There were exhibitors at the conference, from access systems, disaster recovery, display equipment, CD-ROM products, publishers, self-service, shelving. Exhibitors included, amongst others, Ebsco, Science Direct, American Library Association, Book Aid International, Blackwell, CILIP, Ex Libris, IFLA, Swets Blackwell, ProQuest, United Nations, Family history centres.

But the real eye-opener was to follow the yellow footprints to the model children's library which had been organised at the request of the children and young adults section of IFLA and had been developed as a partnership between the British Council, the School and Youth Libraries Group of CILIP and a company called Demco Interiors. The library occupied an area of 144 square metres and showcased the best of children's library design and children's publishing in the UK. Also on display in the library, was a mixed-media exhibition called *Magic pencil* presenting works from some of the UKs leading children's book illustrators (for example Tony Ross, John Burningham, Quentin Blake) and a display of suitable materials for the visually-impaired readers from the UKs National Library for the Blind. During the week, there were various presentations happening in this area, with storytelling, sessions on storytelling and children as readers, and visits from children's authors.

There were about 40 South Africans at the Conference, including a small number from the Western Cape. South Africa (of course) stole the limelight! Kate Murray from the University of Cape Town (UCT) was awarded the first-ever Best Poster Presentation Award for her poster *The managerial process of digital imaging projects at the University of Cape Town Libraries.*

And then came the momentous news that had the South Africans (joined by other delegates from Africa) leaping onto the stage stripping off their jackets (under which were hidden bright orange or bright lemon green South African tourism t-shirts) waving flags, singing and dancing, when it was announced that Durban would be the host city for the 2007 IFLA Conference. What a high note to end the conference on! And what a challenge! The next IFLA Conference will be held in Berlin in 2003.

2002

...concern was expressed about the lack of connections between the school and public libraries, and between the university and public libraries, as they seemed to operate in isolation and forget that they are all part of the community