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Julia Gelfand

This was the first time in over 15 years that the IFLA had met in North America. It was the largest conference attendance and trade show in the history of the IFLA with over 4,200 delegates and hundreds of exhibitors for a total of 5,500 registrants from over 147 countries (IFLA has membership in 153 countries). There were 1,100 first-time attendees. Boston proved to be a magnificent conference city with the Hynes Convention Center adjacent to the Prudential Center complex of shops, hotels and restaurants and with immediate access to Boyleston Street, landmarks of the Boston Public Library and other local attractions nearby. The weather cooperated beautifully, as the summer heat and humidity were not as uncomfortable as earlier weeks in August on the east coast proved to be.

The theme of the conference was "Libraries and Librarians: Making a "Difference in the Knowledge Age", reflecting many cultural and historical traditions that reinforced what a good match Boston was to host this conference. The IFLA has formal relations with many agencies and associations including Unesco, WIPO, International Standards Organization, World Trade Organization, IPA and ICA. Many sub-themes emerged as the conference was planned that included:

1. Advancing the leadership role of the librarian in the knowledge age.

2. Delivering lifelong learning across space and time.

3. Managing information and technology in the knowledge age.

4. Developing information policies for the knowledge age.

5. Forging collaborative partnerships.

6. Making a difference to:

    - government and industry in economic development;

    - society in social and cultural development;

    - researchers and scientists exploring the frontiers of knowledge;

    - children and young adults in learning opportunities in the quality of life to the public.

Several important pre-conferences were held in Boston and throughout the northeast USA and eastern provinces of Canada that exploited these sub-themes.

The IFLA is composed of eight divisions that each have several sections. Each section is responsible for planning and coordinating program content for open sessions and local site visits and meetings that serve the interests of the section's membership. The IFLA also promotes eight core activities, in which programs are offered ranging from:

- copyright and other legal matters;

- free access to information and freedom of expression;

- preservation and conservation;

- universal bibliographic control and international MARC; and

- universal data flow and telecommunications.

The IFLA Web site (www.ifla.org) notes the organizational structure and highlights the meetings at this conference.

The schedule of this IFLA conference included:

- a series of guest lectures;

- open sessions, discussion groups;

- library tours, poster sessions;

- press conferences and new product releases; and

- social events with receptions, entertainment and local cuisine.

A range of programs was offered to accompanying persons, taking them to local historical and cultural sites, neighborhoods, and nearby communities.

The opening session introduced Jonathon Kozol, a Boston resident known for his work on children, literacy and primary schools, as the keynote speaker. The author of many books, including Savage Inequalities: Children in American Schools and Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and Conscience of a Nation, he delivered a passionate address on his work with children and schools and how public libraries can contribute to the voids and gaps in children's lives.

Guest lecturers included the following distinguished speakers:

- Laurence Prusak on Knowledge Management;

- Dr James Billington, Librarian of Congress and scholar of Russian history on the Library of Congress American Memory Project;

- Peter Jaszi on Intellectual Property and Copyright Law;

- Deanna Marcum, President of the Council on Library and Information Resources, and George Farr, Director of the Division of Preservation and Access at the National Endowment for the Humanities on Preservation and Conservation Issues. The IFLA attendees were concerned about the fact that the majority of the Cuban delegation was denied visas to travel to Boston.

Librarians had a wide choice of what site visits to make. Regardless of the type of library in which you worked there were many options in the greater Boston area and arranged tours and visits were made to over 40 libraries at nearly 20 institutions. The local arrangements committee should be commended for arranging and hosting a flawless conference that introduced visitors to a very real sense of Boston and US working libraries.

This writer was handicapped by a very full administrative schedule at the conference and did not attend as many sessions as she wanted. Several important and interesting sessions that attracted large numbers of participants included the following:

1. Internet Discussion Group. Three facilitators introduced topics for break-out discussions and those themes included:
   - digital data standards;

   - censorship including privacy;

   - security and filtering;

   - reference service and training;

   - Web design and presence;

   - uses of catalogs and cataloging;

   - marketing the library via the Internet;

   - collection development issues;

   - addressing the digital divide and other related cultural aspects.

This program is very popular and Anne Lipow summarized the salient points of discussion by saying, "A user's use of information is changing."

2. Performance Measurement in Academic Libraries Discussion Group. Speakers from Germany and Norway addressed issues about the dilemmas in collecting data and the complications of the new standards and definitions that do not always include electronic services.

3. The new Reference Services Section program. The focus of this program was "How is virtual reference different from face-to-face reference and what kind of guidelines and new competencies for reference services is being offered?" Many speakers from the USA and Denmark offered insights about how their institutions have developed new services utilizing a range of technologies to launch e-reference services. E-mail and "Ask a Librarian" reference services are now among the most common and oldest forms of service but emerging technologies allow for new approaches to refining those services in real-time requiring new skills to be acquired by library staff.

4. The Science and Technology Section program. The Science and Technology Section had a program on "Speaking differently: transitions in scholarly "communication", where three speakers addressed different approaches to scholarly communication practices and outcomes. Scientific photographer and illustrator, Felice Frankel from MIT showed slides that promoted her talk, "Making good science look good", and demonstrated the critical aspects of the visual elements and role it plays in documenting research and scholarship. Michael Jensen, from the National Academy Press, addressed new applications in electronic publishing with "Entrepreneurs as social value: public discourse in the sciences", and was followed by Professor Randall Davis from MIT, who spoke on the "Digital dilemma: intellectual property in the information age".

5. Information Technology Section program on "New Information and Communication Technologies for Libraries in the Knowledge Age". Two engaging speakers addressed launches of new services utilizing the latest technologies. Diane Kresh updated attendees about the Collaborative Digital Reference Service (CDRS) at the Library of Congress and how that initiative has world-wide partners and participants. Grace Kempster from the British Council introduced the major outreach programs in which her agency is involved around the globe.

Everyone appeared to enjoy the content that was presented and explored at this meeting, having a large exhibition hall of vendors and suppliers and a rich location of history and culture to absorb. The next IFLA meeting will be in Glasgow, Scotland, August 18-24, 2002 and that too promises to be a wonderful site for professional networking and interactions.

Additional IFLA reports may appear in future issues of LHTN.

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