

*Title of the Satellite Meeting: 'Leadership roles in international librarianship: how can information professionals from Africa, Asia & Oceania, Latin America & Caribbean be part of it?'*

*Date: 20-21 August 2019*

*Location: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt*

## **Uncrossing wires: advocacy to overcome misperceptions of libraries and the ambiguity of 'information'**

### **Winston Roberts**

Office of the National Librarian,

National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand.

E-mail address: [winston.roberts@dia.govt.nz](mailto:winston.roberts@dia.govt.nz)



Copyright © 2019 by Winston Roberts. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

---

### **Abstract:**

*The term 'Information Society' is no longer used much, we now speak of the 'digital era'. The old Millennium Development Goals have given way to a new set of development goals which are to be 'sustainable'. In these goals, at first glance, it might seem that libraries do not occupy a distinct place as resources of information, data and ideas, that their role is not as clear as it was last century in the days of the 'Information Society'. In fact, with some of the world-wide regressive trends that we see at present, the role of libraries as providers of trusted information is more important than ever. IFLA's advocacy tools, strategies and policies in many areas are used at international level, and its members are encouraged to use them at national level.*

*But if 'libraries' are not profiled specifically in the SDGs, should we be concerned? Are there mistaken ideas about libraries circulating? If they do not loom large in countries' planning, then neither will their budgets. How can IFLA clarify the economic value of 'libraries' and 'information' to countries, governments, policy agencies, so that the potential for libraries to support sustainable development can be fully understood beyond our professional sector? Should we not make stronger efforts to quantify the return on investment in library services?*

*IFLA members in all countries are concerned with development, but it is particularly important for members in Division V. The IFLA 'regions' include some of the least-developed countries, and have the lowest levels of membership in IFLA. How can national library associations help their national communities benefit from better and more extensive library services?*

*There are some actions that IFLA members in Division V might take to boost the status of library services, to change perceptions and attract funding. These actions include advocating for integrated national planning for information services, developing links with many sectors other than libraries, education and culture, for example: vocational/trade training, business, cybersecurity, broadcasting/media organisations, R&D organisations, telecoms, development aid agencies, Internet Societies in each country, along with government regulators.*

*The public perception of 'libraries' and 'information' needs to become more inclusive and less confined to bricks-and-mortar libraries, or to the bits and bytes of digital infrastructure. Library associations in Division V should increase their capacity for policy development and advocacy to organisations working in all those areas – to cross boundaries, in the interests of sustainable national development.*

*IFLA members in Division V could help each other with advocacy which respects the cultural specificities of regions and sub-regions, while still maintaining strong professional bonds across the whole organisation. They would then be able to respond flexibly to any future changes in the structure and governance of IFLA.*

**Keywords:** SDGs; advocacy; information society; international development; library services

---

## **Introduction**

The term 'Information Society', that once seemed so bold and radical, is no longer used very much, the 'digital era' is upon us and somehow that is a more vast and all-encompassing reality. However, I wish to defend the older term: there is such a thing as society, and information is or should be its lifeblood.

We have seen the international community effectively draw a line under the old Millennium Development Goals (from only twenty years ago!), which were intended to be attained by 2015. After 2005 it became increasingly clear that these rather prescriptive MDGs would not be attained: ICT development was leaping ahead, economic development in the South was increasing, yet numerous conflicts and climate change posed increasingly strong threats, the global financial crisis undermined the economies of many countries. The international community decided to work towards a new set of more flexible development goals which were to be 'sustainable' in many fields of human endeavour.

And yet it may be asked whether the place of libraries as deep resources of information, data and ideas is as clear now as it was in the days of the 'Information Society'. With some of the world-wide regressive trends that we see at present, the role of libraries as sources (and defenders) of trusted information is more important than ever before. IFLA is doing good work in developing advocacy tools, strategies and policy statements in many areas. These are

used at international level, and IFLA members are encouraged to use them at national and regional level.

### **How are libraries perceived in the ‘information society’?**

The classic Western concept of a library in a developed (industrialised) country has often been translated into something similar in other countries. Just as Carnegie libraries were built over a century ago in many far-flung corners of the world, so in recent decades many new metropolitan public libraries and national libraries in all regions have implemented the most innovative ideas of famous architects. Yet these buildings, however digitally clever they may be, are still clearly identifiable as libraries, spaces for reading, reflection and discovery.

UNESCO promoted library and archive services for many years through specific programmes and funding channels, seeing them as distinct from cultural programmes and distinct from education programmes. The development of the Internet and the concept of the ‘information society’ (or many diverse ‘information societies’ in UNESCO’s view) was accompanied by the development of UNESCO’s Information for All programme (IFAP). In 1992 UNESCO created its ‘Memory of the World’ programme, to apply new electronic technologies to rescue the content of the most vulnerable archives and libraries.

In the digital era UNESCO has increasingly focused on information services (in which libraries play a role), on the digital preservation of/and provision of access to cultural heritage (in which libraries play a major role) and support for education at all levels including by use of ICTs including mobile platforms (where libraries play a more peripheral role).

For many decades now, intergovernmental agencies and national development aid agencies have deployed resources to set up information service points at grassroots level called multi-media community telecentres, or some variation on that name.

To adapt a well-known expression, modern libraries are about both ‘bricks and clicks’ – but in a world where users with digital skills are tempted to seek out their own ‘information’ and by-pass trained intermediaries – a world where built infrastructure is so expensive and electronic access is so fast, libraries have evolved well and offer services that respond to the demands of technologically sophisticated users. There may be some people who have an old-fashioned image of libraries, but stereotypes always lag behind reality.

#### *Libraries in the documents of the World Summit on the Information Society:*

In the ‘Principles’<sup>i</sup> document agreed by the WSIS in Geneva 2003, the role of ‘information’ was clearly identified: states’ delegates declared their

“...common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

*[Geneva ‘Principles’, common vision A, 1.]*

The delegates reaffirmed strongly their belief in both Article 19 and Article 29 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. They went to declare:

“We recognize that education, knowledge, information and communication are at the core of human progress, endeavour and well-being. Further, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have an immense impact on virtually all aspects of our lives. The rapid progress of these technologies opens completely new opportunities to attain higher levels of development. The capacity of these technologies to reduce many traditional obstacles, especially those of time and distance, for the first time in history makes it possible to use the potential of these technologies for the benefit of millions of people in all corners of the world.”  
*[Geneva ‘Principles’.. Common Vision, A, 8.]*

Then in the ‘Information for All’ section, the Geneva ‘Principles’ document stated:

The ability for all to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge is essential in an inclusive Information Society. (....)

The sharing and strengthening of global knowledge for development can be enhanced by removing barriers to equitable access to information for economic, social, political, health, cultural, educational, and scientific activities and by facilitating access to public domain information, .....

..... Information in the public domain should be easily accessible to support the Information Society, and protected from misappropriation. Public institutions such as libraries and archives, museums, cultural collections and other community-based access points should be strengthened so as to promote the preservation of documentary records and free and equitable access to information.

... Each person should have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in order to understand, participate actively in, and benefit fully from, the Information Society and the knowledge economy. Literacy and universal primary education are key factors for building a fully inclusive information society,....

... Content creators, publishers, and producers, as well as teachers, trainers, archivists, librarians and learners, should play an active role in promoting the Information Society, particularly in the Least Developed Countries.

[Geneva ‘Principles’ Section B3]

From our professional perspective, the place of libraries was clearly identified. However it must be emphasised that the focus of the WSIS was on ICTs and specifically the Internet. The term ‘Information Society’ was effectively a synonym for ‘ICTs’ and their development, promotion, exploitation, management and governance – naturally for the public good, and for a wide range of public policy reasons.

The Geneva ‘Principles’ were followed by the 2003 ‘Geneva Plan of Action’<sup>ii</sup> whose Section C ‘Action Lines include 3: ‘Access to Information and Knowledge’ which reads as follows:

- a. Develop policy guidelines for the development and promotion of public domain information as an important international instrument promoting public access to information.
- b. Governments are encouraged to provide adequate access through various communication resources, notably the Internet, to public official information. Establishing legislation on access to information and the preservation of public data, notably in the area of the new technologies, is encouraged.
- c. Promote research and development to facilitate accessibility of ICTs for all, including disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable groups.
- d. Governments, and other stakeholders, should establish sustainable multi-purpose community public access points, providing affordable or free-of-charge access for their citizens to the various communication resources, notably the Internet. These access points should, to the extent possible, have sufficient capacity to provide assistance to users, in libraries, educational institutions, public administrations, post offices or other public places, with special emphasis on rural and underserved areas, while respecting intellectual property rights (IPRs) and encouraging the use of information and sharing of knowledge.
- e. Encourage research and promote awareness among all stakeholders of the possibilities offered by different software models, and the means of their creation, including proprietary, open-source and free software, in order to increase competition, freedom of choice and affordability, and to enable all stakeholders to evaluate which solution best meets their requirements.
- f. Governments should actively promote the use of ICTs as a fundamental working tool by their citizens and local authorities. In this respect, the international community and other stakeholders should support capacity building for local authorities in the widespread use of ICTs as a means of improving local governance.
- g. Encourage research on the Information Society, including on innovative forms of networking, adaptation of ICT infrastructure, tools and applications that facilitate accessibility of ICTs for all, and disadvantaged groups in particular.
- h. Support the creation and development of a digital public library and archive services, adapted to the Information Society, including reviewing national library strategies and legislation, developing a global understanding of the need for "hybrid libraries", and fostering worldwide cooperation between libraries.
- i. Encourage initiatives to facilitate access, including free and affordable access to open access journals and books, and open archives for scientific information.
- j. Support research and development of the design of useful instruments for all stakeholders to foster increased awareness, assessment, and evaluation of different software models and licences, so as to ensure an optimal choice of appropriate software that will best contribute to achieving development goals within local conditions.

[Geneva WSIS POA Section C3. 10.]

A proper study of the history of the international community’s approach to ‘information’ issues would then have to look at the Outcomes Document of the 2<sup>nd</sup> WSIS (Tunis, 2005) and its recommendations regarding Internet governance – particularly the establishment of the

Internet Governance Forum – the whole ‘post-WSIS’ process which led to the development of the UN programme of Sustainable Development Goals that was created in 2015.

However, considering the lack of focus on ‘information’ in the SDGs, and even less focus on libraries, it is instructive to refer back to the Principles and Plan of Action of WSIS 2003. Despite the now out-dated terminology in those 2003 documents, it is clear that the voice of the library sector was heard, just as states heard the voices of developing countries and development agencies. But information services were viewed as an ICT issues, or even as technology issues, and the goal was seen as increasing equitable access to ICTs. The Geneva ‘Principles’ did make references to libraries and other information service points or networks supporting community access to information, education and economic opportunities, even references to literacy. The first WSIS even made a start at identifying social, economic and cultural issues as well as technological issues around ‘information’ and the ‘information society’.

The WSIS debates made it clear that there were significant misunderstandings about the nature of ‘information’. The debates clearly established that there were cultural misunderstandings about the increasing impact of ICTs on societies, and anger in some quarters about the actions of (frequently Western-dominated) media. There were also some attempts to focus the *information society* debate mainly on telecommunications issues, on infrastructure, and to ignore the social impacts. In fact there were attempts to deny the relevance of international agreements such as those dealing with fundamental issues of human rights, freedom of expression, the rights of indigenous peoples and the rights of women and children.

And yet - the first WSIS revealed a broad international consensus on the importance of education, on the need to modernise telecommunications infrastructure, the need to govern the Internet in a way that allowed a more democratic balance between the interests of different parties (governments, technical communities, civil society and business). It was recognised that affordable access to the Internet would advance the development of less well-resourced regions to enable them to exploit the new technologies. The first WSIS actually introduced the concept of integrated national planning for development – the word ‘holistic’ was used by some delegates, though this was a radical notion and didn’t make it through into the final outcomes documents.

The library sector introduced the concept of ‘digital amnesia’ into the debates at the WSIS, to indicate that while rushing ahead with development, communities needed to remember where they had come from, and digitally preserve the evidence of the past.

The 2003 WSIS was also notable for introducing and validating a multi-stakeholder approach to high-level international meetings, thereby introducing the new concept of ‘multistakeholderism’. (We may smile at that term, but it is an indicator of a clamour for democracy in intergovernmental processes, and it is a life-saver for smaller NGOs worldwide, it allows their voices to be heard alongside those of the powerful government and business sectors.) IFLA is one of the major INGOs that have fully used the opportunities open to them for advocacy.

The second WSIS in 2005 focused on international technological and economic development. It set targets for review in 2010 and again in 2015 by which time it was hoped that the MDGs would have been attained. The WSIS promoted work on regional economic development,

particularly in Africa, small island states and many other developing regions. One of the Summit's most significant outcomes was agreement on a process to improve the governance of the Internet. It established the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which it mandated to deal with public policy issues raised by the rapid development of the Internet.

Since 2006 the IGF has been run annually on a multi-stakeholder basis; its discussion forums have given IFLA many opportunities to advocate for less restrictive approaches to access to information, freedom of expression and the use of intellectual property.

IFLA had been heavily involved in the WSIS process from 2002 onwards: as an NGO observing at the Summits, and as an adviser to many national delegations at the Summits. However after the Summits, it soon became clear to the international community that the MDGs were unlikely to be attained by 2015, so the work was transformed into a process seeking a more open-ended approach. This became known as the 'post-WSIS' process which, as noted above, led to the creation of the UN SDGs<sup>iii</sup>.

IFLA was again an active participant in the multi-stakeholder post-WSIS process, and as an effective advocate to the UN on the role of library services in the information society and information economy, to support sustainable development. Yet we see that 'libraries' as such do not appear in the SDGs. The question may be asked why not? They were mentioned in the WSIS documents.

#### *Where are 'libraries' in the SDGs?*

Are there mistaken perceptions of libraries? What risks does that imply? It would seem to be a strategic challenge for IFLA. If 'libraries' do not loom large in countries' planning, then neither will budgets for them. But maybe that is looking in the wrong direction... IFLA has been quite correct to advocate for a subtle understanding (by authorities at all levels) of the value of information access and information skills in the process of developing sustainable societies.

Perhaps we should better define what we mean by 'libraries', or the purpose of libraries. We should focus more on aims and desired outcomes, and less on process issues:

- Libraries support education – that is Goal 4.
- Libraries support sustainable communities and cities – that is Goal 11.
- Libraries support many social goods and human rights – that is Goal 16.

Libraries provide information and advice to their users, passing information skills to their users, which enable them to build their lives and their society in a way that is sustainable. The SDGs cover all issues of human civilisation and balanced development: they do not prescribe that we should build libraries – but we can see in these goals and indicators that the value of what we normally consider as the outcomes of library *services* is very well understood:

#### SDG 16

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

For IFLA to succeed in promoting its (our) professional agenda and values, it must clarify the economic value of ‘libraries’ and ‘information’ to countries, governments, policy agencies, so that the potential for libraries to support sustainable development can be fully understood by those outside our professional sector. Libraries indeed have the potential to be “motors for change”: that argument is increasingly being recognised (most recently at the Buenos Aires meeting<sup>iv</sup>). Now is the moment to redouble efforts to quantify the economic return on investment in deep stores of information, mechanisms to deliver information, capacity building, and the design of improved services equally to all sectors of our often fragmented societies.

In publishing the 2019 edition of the report on ‘Development of Access to Information’ (DA2I)<sup>v</sup>, IFLA has correctly stated that libraries should be viewed not as a cost but as an investment. IFLA members need to advocate for this approach to their local and national authorities, and for this approach to be adopted in regional development programmes in which their countries participate, in the economic sphere as well as the cultural and education sphere.

It would be a great advantage to IFLA to have available to it a set of recommendations based on an up-to-date analysis of the return on investment in ‘information’ services and the economic benefits to society and to individual citizens: intangible benefits are still benefits, social capital has value. Could IFLA propose to the international community guidelines for the development of such an analysis? Could that analysis be directed at identifying the costs and benefits of investing in economic well-being?

### **IFLA and development – or: developing IFLA?**

IFLA members in all countries are concerned with development, but it is particularly important for members in Division V. The IFLA ‘regions’ include some OECD members, and some fast-developing countries, but these ‘regions’ also include a large number of the least developed countries, and they have the lowest levels of membership in IFLA. How can small national library associations – funded mainly by low membership subscriptions - help their national communities benefit from better and more extensive library services? How can they help find more funding for library services, and how can they overcome financial barriers to participating in the international exchange of ideas?

We may also ask: how can the very smallest national library associations in developing countries grow their membership, within their own national economies? And how can we expect them to justify IFLA membership when to so many library workers at the grassroots, an international NGO seems so distant in every respect?

Within the largest IFLA region, Asia-Oceania, there are constant stresses owing to the fact this ‘region’ covers half the globe. It is not actually a region, it is everything that remains outside the more culturally homogenous regions called Europe, North America, LAC and Africa. Over many years some within IFLA have called for splitting up ‘Asia & Oceania’, to make its existing ‘sub-regions’ more autonomous within the Federation, or even make them separate regions. This remains a topic for debate, and the outcome is not pre-ordained. On the one hand, small sub-regions would perhaps be more culturally homogeneous, but on the other hand they would not necessarily be economically stronger and able to develop the library profession and send more delegates to participate in IFLA work. They might in fact become more isolated than they are at present within the current ‘catch-all’ structure of the regional

Sections, which at least present the advantage that cultures and languages meet around the same table.

The solution to an artificial division of the world is not necessarily to create different divisions: the solution could be to give each of the developing regions within IFLA a stronger voice, to enable members there to increase their ability to advocate to their own authorities for a greater understanding of how integrated information planning and policies in their countries could use libraries to boost education outcomes, social stability, and sustainable *appropriate* economic growth.

A similar focus on better integration (rather than division) could also be helpful within our regional Sections. The question should be: how to give the regional members within IFLA a stronger voice: by capacity building? By reviewing the organisation's democratic structures, processes and mechanisms? Should we develop IFLA's workforce, skills and policy capacity in the regions by taking a top-down approach or a bottom-up approach? We certainly need to increase membership of the Federation in the South, and the best way to do it is not just to perfect our structure and processes but to demonstrate to more institutions and associations within the regions that there is identifiable value from joining and participation in IFLA's work – to demonstrate not only to them but to the authorities who control their budgets.

The DA2I Report helps us to argue that there is a continuum from basic literacy through functional literacy then 'digital literacy' working for better education outcomes and social cohesion, leading to better health outcomes and overall well-being. But still, we need precise figures, and close study of cases.

The recent IFLA meeting in Argentina would seem to indicate that bringing national authorities across the region on board generates positive expressions of support. If those positive messages are heard at the grassroots, by people operating community libraries, and also heard in bureaucracies by people who design and fund programmes, then perhaps links in thinking will be made up and down the chain, and library and information professionals at all levels of experience will be given the resources to act more effectively for their communities.

*Some suggestions for advocacy by associations:*

There are many possible actions that IFLA members in Division V might take to boost the status of library services, to change perceptions of them, to attract funding to them. These actions include:

- advocating for integrated planning for information and library services at national level (that is to say, integrating these into economic planning);
- developing links with many sectors other than libraries, education and culture, for example: vocational/trade training, business, cybersecurity experts, broadcasting/media organisations, R&D organisations, telecommunications providers;
- working with national development aid agencies as a contribution to regional aid programmes, especially those which include libraries, archives and education infrastructure;
- working with national Internet Societies in each country, along with government regulators, to bridge the gaps in understanding between providers and regulators of

Internet services, and the intermediaries and consumers of information services and products distributed using the Internet platforms;

- working with public health authorities and civil defence agencies to ensure that populations are fully informed about the health and security effects of progressive climate change and other sudden natural disasters.

In particular, the library profession needs to work much more closely with related professions: archives, museums, where possible – where they have shared concerns (about funding, preservation of cultural heritage, developing a common core curriculum for training, and tie that into national tertiary education programmes. Library and archives programmes and services should be seamlessly integrated where possible. We know this is possible, because in many developing countries it is already being done (in the South Pacific island states, for example, where PARBICA is stronger than IFLA).

Library associations nationally should take on some capacity for policy development and advocacy to organisations working in all those areas – to cross boundaries, in the interests of sustainable national development.

#### *Advocacy by IFLA:*

IFLA has a core advocacy programme (IAP), now part of its Library Development Programme (LDP): it should continue to play an effective role in advocacy to UN agencies and other stakeholders on issues that are critical for our profession and the services we provide in our communities. IFLA engages in some training activities in the regions: that is an activity which LDP could further develop: could we see IFLA advocacy trainers in future advising national association members how to develop their own advocacy programmes to meet their own objectives vis à vis their national authorities and policy-makers? However we do also need to critically evaluate the long-term impact of training activities carried out so far.

IFLA could perhaps also make more use of its FAIFE programme for cautious diplomatic advocacy. We live in a world of intercultural distrust and disruption, not helped by media which no longer seem to merit the trust that we once placed in them. Libraries however are still seen as trusted neutral spaces, which help users to filter untrustworthy ‘information’ and develop critical thinking skills.

IFLA members in Division V could help each other with advocacy which takes into account the cultural specificities of regions and sub-regions, to develop IFLA membership. They would then be able to respond flexibly to any changes that might be made in future in the structure and governance of IFLA.

The IFLA regions need to be able to rely on strong regional offices with staff having excellent communication skills, and also skills in training and advocacy. The ROs are the fixed points in the IFLA regions: they should be enabled to act not only as relay stations but also as firm bases. Could we envisage IFLA’s Governing Board meetings being held occasionally at Regional Offices in future? If IFLA hopes to grow its membership in the ‘global South’, and to help its members respond to the existential challenge of climate change, and the political and cultural challenge of the ‘Pacific century’ then the cost of greater (more frequent) face-to-face contact should also be factored in to operational budget calculations.

Let us recall that the theme of this satellite meeting is: how information professionals in the regions can take leadership roles in international librarianship. For that, leaders and leadership programmes need to be developed within countries and within professional associations: people with drive and ambition are needed, people who can relate to library workers at the grassroots while also advocating for them to decision makers. Leaders must be able to advocate successfully for ‘the profession’ in terms of recognition, training, pay, conditions of service, etc, but most importantly they must understand how to advocate for official recognition of the role that professionally-run libraries play in meeting the social and educational needs of local communities and then of the national community: recognition of the need to plan for and fund such services in an integrated way.

Within library services, and within associations, efforts should be made to identify individuals who show potential to be leaders, and give them opportunities to develop that potential, at national level first of all, rising democratically through the ranks of their association. That is important because such people need to be committed to supporting association work, team players just as much as individual stars.

There is not really a separate branch of the profession called ‘international librarianship’: we are speaking of the same set of skills, attitudes and ethics that an individual develops in the first years of his or her career, which can be translated into cooperative action at the international level. For that, personal qualities such as empathy and inter-cultural understanding are required, strengthened by some form of training (in service training on the job, or through structured short courses). We need leaders who can transcend their own cultural background, and see the values that are universally shared by all cultures; and particularly leaders who will advocate for and defend information policies based on truth, balance, equality, justice – leaders who will defend international agreements on the application of these values in each country’s laws. (These are the values that were reaffirmed by the 1<sup>st</sup> WSIS.)

Looking at it that way, information professionals from the IFLA ‘regions’ are just as capable of rising to leadership roles as any other IFLA members. However there are some factors that may hold back IFLA members in the ‘regions’: one is the need to travel long distances to participate in face-to-face meetings which are held in major world population centres; another is the small professional base in many countries of the IFLA ‘regions’; and another factor is language. These are mainly socio-economic factors. However, all of these factors are known, the various possible solutions are known, and most international organisations (governments, business, civil society) also have to grapple with them.

IFLA has arrangements to mitigate some of these factors. However, in the case of IFLA, there are some things which have aggravated these factors over recent years. One is internal: the increasing complexity of IFLA’s structure; another is external: the stresses in the world economy and increases in the cost of running (and travelling to) major international events. And there are a couple of ‘wild cards’: the Internet, which provides us with a marvellous tool for information management, but also threatens us with technological and ethical problems; and the increasing international climate of disputing, undermining and challenging rules, beliefs and ‘certainties’ that underlie cultures, systems of government and the ‘broad international consensus’.

It is worth remembering that IFLA was founded in 1927 in Edinburgh, Scotland, as an international association in a defined Western cultural space, concentrated mainly in Europe, whose members were associations (not institutions), among whose distinguished representatives there were more gentlemen than ladies. Following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, IFLA members began to advocate for expansion, but it was not until 1980 that IFLA held its first congress in Asia, then in 1984 its first in Africa, then in 1994 its first in Latin America. Now, in a few short years, we will come to the centenary congress, in 2027. IFLA has grown into a rainbow coalition of all branches of our profession, representing almost all countries, speaking 7 languages. The ‘regional’ sections of IFLA are active and articulate.

And yet, the number of IFLA members in the ‘regions’ is still very low: how can we increase the number of members in the ‘South’ including in the developing countries, in order to make IFLA fully representative, and in order to increase (sustainably) the financial contribution from an increased membership base...? Why? - so that IFLA can plough back more of its resources into the sort of programmes that will benefit the regions in general and younger generations of professionals in particular.

## Conclusions

The library sector is changing in response to challenges, but remains true to its values. However the worldwide challenges are likely to become more severe, with insecurity, climate change and migration. Our best response is to commit to working for increased equitable access to information, and for the integration of information and library policies and planning into national planning processes. Libraries should show leadership but should also collaborate across professional sectors: that also applies to IFLA sections in the global South.

---

## References

- <sup>i</sup> WSIS Geneva ‘Declaration of Principles’: <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>
- <sup>ii</sup> WSIS Geneva ‘Plan of Action’: <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> SDGs - <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
- <sup>iv</sup> IFLA President’s meeting, Buenos Aires, May 2019 - <https://www.ifla.org/node/92200>
- <sup>v</sup> DA2I – for the IFLA news release see: <https://www.ifla.org/node/92187>  
and for the Report see: <http://da2i.ifla.org/>