

Access to Knowledge: Networking Libraries

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The third IFLA Presidential Meeting:

« An important event for networking »

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1. Thanks

I would like first to thank «Bibliothek & Information International» for the important financial help provided to me in order to attend the meeting and to travel to Germany. Without this I would not have been able to travel and to realize the objectives fixed for this project:

- attend the presidential meeting and
 - o profit from the conferences
 - o participate in discussions
 - o meet some of the speakers
 - o discuss with participants from around the world
- attend the mid-year-meeting of the IFLA Management and marketing section
- carry on our project on German Libraries Network in:
 - o accompanying one student from Université de Montréal
 - o making connections for some interviews
 - o getting rich input from the situation in German libraries
 - o talking to German librarians

I would like also to thank:

- Lise Rebout from the Goethe Institut in Montreal who helped a lot in connecting people in Germany
- Claudia Lux
- And Hella Klauser who facilitated everything for us before leaving and on site.

2. The conference

The theme of the conference was « Access to Knowledge: Networking Libraries » with a focus on the Arabic world libraries. Therefore many conferences presented various networks and realizations from Arab speaking colleagues. Although I have been in Arab countries before, much of what was said was new to me since my knowledge of the Arab world was limited to the French-speaking part of it (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria).

The opening conferences by Ellen Tise and Claudia Lux were very interesting. The first talked more about the role of librarians in developing countries and was very pertinent in the context of this meeting. As usual, Ellen Tise was a very good speaker. On the other hand, Claudia Lux talked more about new technologies in libraries and especially how to make the link between the «have» and the «have not». Again this was quite appropriate and we can say that the two keynote speakers completed very well each other.

In the afternoon of the first day we had the pleasure to hear a few interesting cases of cooperation initiatives all pertaining to the theme of the conference, networking. I particularly appreciated Sohair Wastawy's paper. Her presentation was very dynamic, using stimulating pictures in her Power Point, and also concepts which are striking the imagination as this idea of «Generation C» which is now knocking on all the libraries' doors.

The last session of the first day was dedicated to Information Literacy, a very important topic in the development of libraries and library networks. Gladys Saade's paper about the situation of IL as seen from Beyrouth was interesting, as well as this presentation from Malaysia where – surprisingly - they seem to do a lot of interesting things in Information Literacy.

The second day started with a very stimulating session on digital knowledge and cultural heritage. I was happy to hear our colleague Driss Khrouz from the Moroccan National Library: he has been appointed recently and it was the first time we heard about his views on that topic. Later I had a good conversation with him. He is doing a very good job and it will be interesting to follow what will happen in the next years in his Library.

I also enjoyed very much Elisabeth Niggemann's presentation. Indeed, this trip to Germany was also made in the context of a research we are doing about German libraries network and Ms Niggemann's paper was right on the topic. Unfortunately

she came only for her presentation and we did not have the chance to talk with her, which would have been very helpful for us.

Finally the meeting ended in a very dynamic way as Claudia Lux moderated a panel discussion on partnership and digitization. All panelists presented interesting ideas and the discussion between them and the attendance was a nice way to close this conference.

I have also to mention that I really appreciated the social evening on the first day at the «Zentral- und landesbibliothek» which was delicious. We had very nice music followed by a reception that gave us an opportunity to exchange with the other participants.

3. Other meetings

Right after the presidential meeting I had to leave urgently to attend the first part of the IFLA Management and Marketing mid-year meeting. The meeting was organized by Steffen Wawra from the University Library in Passau. It was held at the beautiful Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. This gave me the opportunity to visit this other library which is indeed exceptional.

About ten people attended this meeting where we discussed business matters of the Section: report from past activities and planning of activities to come. The meeting lasted for two days and was very successful.

During these few days I also worked with my student Jérémie Pernet who was also attending the meeting. We discussed the data collection for the research he is conducting in my course at Université de Montréal on the networking of German Libraries.

I also profited from my stay in Berlin to have informal meetings with IFLA people, like this one with Ingeborg Verheuil and Jenifer Nicholson about what IFLA HQ should do to help libraries in time of economic crisis.

4. Outcomes and conclusion

Overall this incursion in Germany, which lasted only one week, was very productive and intensive.

Attending the IFLA Presidential Meeting was especially appreciated. I was not able to attend the first two meetings but this one being on networking, which is an important topic for my work, was a must. And also, being interested in libraries in the Arab world, I could not miss this one !

I would say that most of the papers presented were top level contributions. Moreover, being there on site gave me the possibility to discuss with many colleagues, thus multiplying the outcomes of the trip.

The first important outcome is certainly the fact that together with my student Jérémie Pernet we collected «first hand» information which will serve in the preparation of our report on German libraries which should be available by May (we will send you a copy of course).

The other important outcome might be the cooperation we might have in the future with some colleagues present on site. I already mentioned the discussion I had with Driss Khrouz who was very eager to explore any cooperation that could be established between his institution and mine concerning the education of librarians in Morocco. But I also discussed cooperation with my colleague Hans-Christoph Hobhom from the University of Postdam and we might build some project together with our two universities, as Dr Hobhom speaks French fluently (unfortunately this is not the case for me with German...).

On a more personal view, I would say that I enjoyed very much the city of Berlin and the hospitality of my German colleagues. Unfortunately my stay was too short to explore fully all the aspects of the rich professional life you have in Germany, but I saw enough to raise in me the desire to go back. I know there are some interesting exchange programs between Canada and Germany and it is not impossible that one day I would plan another and more in-depth project with Germany.