

## Services for all and potential for influence - views of the new Vice president and president of IFLA

*Just at the beginning of this summer, we were happy to learn that Sinikka Sipilä, Chairperson of the Finnish Library Association, has been elected to serve as President-elect for the term 2011-2013 and to serve as President of IFLA for the term 2013-2015. This gave a very good reason to have a cup of coffee with Sinikka Sipilä and let her share her thoughts of libraries.*

### **Libraries are the most used cultural service in Finland. How did we do it?**

- I think, this is firstly based on our values. Reading and knowledge have been valued as a part of the Finnish Way of Living for decades. I remember, how these values came up even in a publication "Libraries changed my life", which the Finnish Library Association published to celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the Association, Sinikka Sipilä reminds.

- Our interest in books is also reflected in a wide

variety of publications, including both books and journals. We have versatility on our domestic publishing sector, Sipilä emphasizes.

- We also have a wide range of cultural activities and festivals, especially during the summer time. All these cultural interests also make libraries an elementary actor in this chain. Cultural interests feed each other.

- Legislation has played an evident part in the development of the library network, as well. The Library Act from 1961 has greatly contributed to the success of libraries by guaranteeing state funding for libraries. By strong support of the state we have been able to develop an efficient and extensive network of libraries in Finland.

- Libraries have also gained political support from different parties. Libraries are open for all and serve all equally, irrespective of their opinions. The Finnish library sector is efficiently and extensively networked and co-operates also closely with third parties, like educational institutions.

### **Why are libraries important?**

- I think that the most important for libraries, as we

can see in Finland, is that they can from their part guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens. The Mission of libraries concern access to information, but they also strengthen the role of education, Sipilä explains.

- In Finland people are generally well educated. Free access to information and free education has had a significant role to make this happen. Libraries and schools together have made this progress possible through several decades.

- Libraries serve all. Our working principle to offer versatile materials from different fields of knowledge is still valid and valuable. We give access to information, support cultural values and equality.

- Libraries have been the memory of mankind. This is easy to forget in the era of the internet and giant databases. To continue in this role, libraries need to create synergies between our old and new service models.

### **What are the future challenges for libraries?**

- Economy and resources of libraries certainly form a major concern for libraries in the present situation, Sipilä points out. - But there are many other challenges as well. How do we attract users in the future, especially the next generation of users. The use of libraries on a habitual base has been formed at home and at school. Libraries should work in a close co-operation with educational institutions to have their involvement and support to maintain their connections in the future.

- E-books have made a breakthrough, but concerning Finnish public libraries, there is a lack of relevant contents on the marketplace. Also, there are many juridical issues which should be solved, before e-books can find their way to libraries, Sipilä sums up.

- It will be harder for Finnish libraries to serve users in a countryside or in small communities in the future. Libraries are merged to larger units and many small libraries have been closed. It is still an open question how we will be able to maintain their level of services, Sipilä worries. -

Multicultural services also would require attention and new perspectives from us.

### **What can be done to a generation gap in a library field?**

- Young professionals should be taken into account in recruiting. And from the perspective of library associations, I think we should pay attention that we have young professionals well represented in our library associations, Sipilä states.

- And we happily support groups and initiatives of young professionals, like Nuorkirjastolaiset.

### **Which kind of new developments in libraries have surprised you lately?**

- I am happy to see that the focus of libraries has turned on users' perspectives. And versatility of additional services in public libraries has made an impression on me, Sipilä ponders. - It is also refreshing to see how extensively Finnish libraries are networked and co-operate with third parties, especially with educational institutions and social workers. Some libraries even have hired a social worker to enrich their services for teens.

### **Which moments in your library career have made you satisfied? Is this unnecessary question at the moment?**

- Well, I certainly greatly appreciate my nomination as IFLA vice-president and president. However, it has also been valuable for me and for Finnish libraries to be able to have IFLA Conference in Helsinki 2012. Personally, I have especially enjoyed working on IFLA committees and IFLA Governing Board and experienced that this work has been very fruitful.

- As we know, IFLA is a major player in library field to advance interests of libraries. IFLA has a global coverage in a library field and offers a joint forum for different library types, library associations and individual libraries. Our challenge is to support developing countries as IFLA participants. However, there are many current issues in which

IFLA's standpoints and involvement would be required, e.g. related to copyrights and access to information, Sipilä concludes. - Since IFLA has a substantial and recognized role, it can become influential in international forums, like WIPO and EU in library and information sector related matters.

### **How do you relax outside your library work?**

- I spend my summer weekends and holidays mostly with my family at our summer cottage. It

has become as a tradition for us to make a joint art exhibition of our paintings among our family. I enjoy painting and as much as I have time for it, I gladly participate in diverse cultural activities and exercise.

- Päivikki Karhula