

Behind the scenes of the IFLA 2012 Helsinki Conference

Tuula Ruhanen

Many Finnish librarians still remember with joy the day at IFLA 2009 in Milan when we heard the announcement of Helsinki being accepted as the conference venue for IFLA 2012. Oh, what an opportunity for the whole Finnish library life! The previous IFLA conference was held in Finland such a long time ago: in 1965 with c. 400 delegates. For IFLA 2012 we would be planning a conference for c. 3000 visitors from 150 countries.

2 years of work behind

The National Committee (NC) of the IFLA 2012 Conference was set up and its members were called at the beginning of 2010. Two years is not too long period for planning such a big conference by meeting once a month to take place in such a small country.

The NC cooperates closely with the two other main organizers of the Conference: the IFLA Headquarters and the Conference Office K.I.T. Right from the beginning it was clear that all the library sectors and library associations, the biggest libraries in the capital area and the library schools would have representatives on the Committee. The NC has also members from various areas of Finland, including Swedish and Finnish speaking colleagues. The National Committee is jointly chaired by: *Maija Berndtson* from Helsinki City Library, *Sinikka Sipilä* from the Finnish Library Association, and *Kim-*

mo Tuominen from Jyväskylä University Library.

The NC is in charge of: the opening and the closing ceremonies, the cultural evening, recruiting and training volunteer workers for the conference days. Also, the NC has given suggestions to IFLA, for example concerning keynote speakers, plenary speakers, the conference logo and many other things. Moreover, it has planned some special programs, events and happenings, which are not part of the official program but which, we hope, will be of interest for IFLA visitors. Also, the NC has set up some special working groups, such as the Library Visits Group and the Social Events Group etc., as well as the

Volunteers Coordinators Group with a task to recruit and train volunteer workers for the conference week.

Blue-shirted volunteers

Most Finnish libraries and library chiefs have had a very favorable attitude to the IFLA conference arrangements. They themselves

have contributed to the work of the NC and they have given their staff a permission to participate in the working groups and other jobs. It is widely understood that participating is a wonderful opportunity to learn how IFLA functions and an excellent way to become acquainted with features of international librarianship.

Most libraries have made it possible for volunteers to work for IFLA the whole conference week. We started to promote the recruiting of volunteers as early as in the autumn 2010. From the beginning it was clear that in Finland we had no need to 'tempt' volunteers as it has happened in many other countries. Rather, our problem might turn out to be that we would not be able to post up all those willing to work as volunteers. To date, over 270 volunteers from all over the country, some from abroad, are prepared to work for the Conference. They come from various library sectors and there are also some library students among them.

During the IFLA Conference you will meet Volunteers in their blue T-shirts everywhere. They will welcome you at the airport and at railway and bus stations; you will meet them at registration desks, you will see them as room attendants and as living signs in the conference halls and session rooms.

Some of them will have special tasks: they will assist the IFLA President, the President Elect and the Secretary General; some of them will assist the IFLA Office, some the Conference Office, some the IFLA Governing Board, and some the NC, respectively, in their rooms, and some will also assist the interpreters. Any time of the day you are welcome to meet Volunteers Coordinators at their du-

ty desk in front of the Panorama Restaurant. All this means about 6000 working hours shared between 270 volunteers.

Close IFLA connections

What we have learned during these two years. Working on an international level requires flexibility, understanding of other working cultures, and certain stability in decisions. Good knowledge of IFLA functions has been of great help, and we have been fortunate to have many IFLA 'veterans' among us.

Particularly, we have been lucky to have Sinikka Sipilä, the President Elect, on the National Committee. With her permanent contacts with the 'IFLA core' she has kept us updated on the most current news on IFLA. Weekly telephone meetings with the Conference Office staff and the IFLA Headquarters, as well as their visits to Helsinki, have given us free tuition about working styles in different countries.

While working closely together with colleagues from all the library sectors we have also created a new way for the future cooperation. This working habit will be more and more valuable when we are facing the world wide economic challenges. I see this work as a start for joining our forces in the field of librarianship and information science. 📖

Information on the writer

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