Information Technology Section

Annual Report 2007

German Member of the Standing Committee of the section: Reinhard Altenhöner (2007 – 2011; Deutsche Nationalbibliothek / German National Library).

Reinhard Altenhöner was re-elected as Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Information Technology Section of IFLA. Ms Alenka Kavčič-Čolić from the Slovenian National Library is elected as the new Secretary and Edmund Balnaves from the Australian Company Prosentient Systems is elected as the new Information Officer.

The Information Technology Section is a cross-section that is responsible for an issue-area concerning almost all other sections more or less in different ways. Therefore, the IT section especially concentrates on innovative developments and emerging trends in their impact on the different work fields of the libraries and introduces them into the discussion. The section also is endeavoured to encourage the use of standardised formats and protocols, according to its focal point onto the interoperability of services.

These principles also mirror in the IFLA conference presentations of this year, which the section has either taken responsibility of or independently organised.

The subject matter of Web-2.0 also played a special role in the event organised together with the section National Libraries and ICABS on the subject of „National libraries and resource discovery strategies - local, national and global". Besides the application of new technologies for the integration of information provisions from libraries in new usage contexts the integration of the users as introducers of information relevant for libraries were discussed. This topic was concluded and specialised according to the specific particulars of librarianship in its principle meaning and its (technical) potentials by Patrick Danowski (Berlin State Library). His contribution was entitled: „Libraries 2.0 and user-generated content: what can the users do for us?". During the intensive discussion and along many other IFLA meetings it loomed that the term Library 2.0 and the discussions around it are a positive debate that should be followed up intensively.

During its own self-organised meeting the Information Technology Section used the opalescent term of „second life" to search for new approaches for libraries' work in usage contexts which have not been taken into account yet.

On a meeting entitled „Second Life for libraries: Let's give users what they want: user driven library services" about 200 participants discussed the innovation power of technically and contentually new offers whose common feature is mainly to be seen in its user transmissionness.

On a meeting entitled „Knowledge for development a case study of SARDC's Virtual Library for Southern Africa" Mr. ALFRED GUMBWA from the South African Research & Documentation Centre, Harare, Zimbabwe) introduced the services of the supra-regional operating centre, that can enjoy a strongly growing popularity. Mr. David Karnes from the University of Nebraska, Omaha, USA introduced a completely different approach, which is meeting a requirement referring usage, urgent especially in the USA, in his contribution entitled „Technology for providing materials in 94 world languages: a partnership for user-driven learning, and improved awareness of the people and events that shape our world". With governmental support the library meets the strongly growing demand of learning foreign languages through a co-operation with a broadcasting service provider who provides libraries and university camps with foreign language courses named SCOLA via cable and internet.

In their contribution „Development of a Library 2.0 service model for an African library" Ms. Heila Peinaar and Ms. Ina Smith from the University of Pretoria in South Africa introduced the features which can be

realised with a relatively small effort, if existing tools are used and library data are adjusted to these services, this can be understood as an invitation to imitate and participate.

The final speech entitled „Gallica 2.0 a second life for the BnF digital library" gave rise to an intensive discussion. It was held by Catherine Lupovici from the National Library of France who introduced a prototype of an innovative access interface for digital collection of the library. The aim of this new approach which was accompanied intensively by usability studies (the results of 550 surveys among students were used for its development) is to find reusable acknowledges for the future European platform. Besides different possibilities for the personalisation the associative links of search terms with other search patterns, different graphic reprocessings of the contentwise search, the implication of standardisation data and specific and controllable drill downs in this application based upon search engine technology were of interest.

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Especially this event clearly showed that the libraries are very much interested in new trends and developments. The IT section intends to meet this requirement also by establishing a Special Interest Group (SIG) on the subject of Library 2.0. For this reason the section utilises the result of the discussion about structural changes within the IFLA organisation where the section brought in the targets – strengthen the self-organised groups, initiatives and activities – in order to support innovations in a more organisationally adequate way. The new SIG should not only amplify the daily updated trends and discussions (for example WEB 2.0 as commercially standing services) but it should also follow up technical approaches partly based upon Semantic Web and lying close to "classic" library-oriented offer structures.

Further thematic priorities were the question about equipment of libraries in emerging market countries and developing countries with information technology for one thing, and securing the long-term availability of digital publications for another thing. These core aims already mirror in the strategy planning of the section but will be brought into the revised version more trenchantly.

The preparations for the next IFLA World Conference in Quebec aim for an event of about four hours together with the section Preservation and Conservation and perhaps a further section where the future technical and organisational infrastructure of long-term preservation will take centre stage.

Another event will turn on solutions for smaller sized and in their financial und organisational possibilities limited libraries and innovative technical architectures for them, reducing their local effort to a minimum because central web-based tools come into effect. Best practise examples will be searched for and introduced. Therewith the section continues its endeavours to support the activities especially in the developing and emerging countries – in this case it explicitly focuses the concerns of libraries whose capacities are limited in a similar way because of their size and position – so the subject of internet connectivity is partly not trivial, even in the "developed" countries.

A preconference was put into the process of planning for the next but one conference in Milan. The discussions on the conference and for the concentration of the section activities onto certain core topics also lead to a reassessment of the section's name. It became very clear in the further reflections, that the general requirement to cover the demands of information technologies became too far gone and should be more specified. An according thrust will be forwarded within IFLA.

Preconference about management techniques and library systems in developing countries: Open Source compared to commercial solutions in Dakar

It becomes more and more common to have satellite meetings and preconferences before and after an IFLA main conference which are meant to intensify thematic focuses in an international context. In co-operation with the sections information technology, management and marketing and the Africa Section there was a preconference entitled „Managing technologies and library automated systems in developing

countries: open source VS commercial options". About 50 librarians came together in a conference which was organised locally by the University of Dakar in co-operation with the Goethe Institut Dakar, where the conference took place. According to the intensive discussions this conference actually obtained workshop character. In 16 contributions speakers from Europe, USA and particularly from Black Africa and Arabia (especially the Maghreb countries) introduced as is analyses, solution scenarios and models as well as consequences for education and governmental assistance measures and discussed options and future challenges for two days.

The question, which role the libraries and with this the accessibility to the (global) information infrastructure play in countries which suffer strongly from poverty was a focal point of the discussion. The answer to this question was unanimous: especially in those countries the establishment of a computerised library and information structure is important and meaningful. Improvements in this area would be helpful in the end to get along with solving the poverty problem at least to some extend. However, looking back onto 30 years of development policy on this area, too, we have learned that, except for several very positive (individual) examples, the basic conditions and framework developments for the permanent access of basic technologies are disillusioning. For example, the maintenance of a network infrastructure on a local basis and especially a steady internet access is a permanent problem.

As the title of the conference shows, the question, to what extend the use of Open Source Software (OSS) can be an adequate strategy for the implementation of library systems in developing countries, plays a major role. Case studies show that this approach almost always demands a much higher initialisation effort, which provides a more stable and longer lasting work platform for the longer term. For example, the situation in the University of Malawi Libraries, who was equipped with hardware and software and supported by an US American foundation, descriptively shows that these kinds of aid measurements do not function if the licenses are limited and if there is no provision for the complex hardware equipment (contribution of Dorothy Eneya). The system maintenance became worse, times of non-use increased, after 5 years the licenses expired and could not be extended because of finances and the system could not be used anymore. Now the library is preparing for the migration of its data into an OSS system based on low-price PC technology, and to run the library system on this basis in the future. Similar and concretely described experiences during the establishment of OSS software on the Ivory Coast, at Senegal, at Congo and other countries encouraged **(whom?)** to follow this way. It became very very clear that the sustainability often can only be guaranteed through an increase of education and advanced training, the establishment of regular exchange forums or through the support by according counselling centres. In the end an OSS strategy demands a complex attending preparation.

Another important matter in the discussions and speeches was the question how an applicable choice of OSS on the area of library systems can be made according to the wide variety of OSS, besides CDS/ISIS (provided and maintained by UNESCO since many decades) with a strong focus on cataloguing, mainly the product KOHA originally from New Zealand was discussed as well as the French software PMB, which does not offer a real Open Source licence but is available for libraries free of charge. This product actually spreads in the French-speaking countries. The KOHA software turned out to be a mighty and well-engineered tool which is used worldwide in the meantime.

After these ascertainments the question was pointed out how the establishment of this software in particular, but as well how software and system establishment can be supported more efficiently. A good idea could be the establishment of national or regional centres who could be in charge of counselling and support as well as network development, but above all performance of trainings.

The previously started activities of eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries), which is an international member organisation which used to be concentrated on making electronic licenses available to threshold countries, were mentioned in it's own series of lectures. In the meantime eIFL follows many other activities, among others the publication of OpenSourceSoftware in libraries in co-operation with other institutes attended by several foundations. The IFLA Information Technology Section supports these activities in different ways.

Recently a series of training workshops for OSS Greenstone, a software library for the administration of digital collections, which is meant to index digital collections and above all to make them more transparent in its database and exchangeable between libraries and other institutions, was performed in different South African countries.

Further contributions about the Foundation Global Library and the future demands according to the actual Web-2.0 trends completed the successful conference. It is remarkable that it was possible to perform what normally is a challenge: bringing together the French-speaking and the English-speaking countries in Africa. This was possible because in this subject-specific context the starting conditions are very similar for all of them.

The following conclusion can be made: Even though there are very positive examples for the successful establishment and the operation of commercial software systems, for example Trinidad/Tobago, Jamaica and Barbados, so it is recommended especially to the persons responsible for decisions in Black Africa and Arabia to put their trust in OSS developments and to invest in the qualification of their employees. The transfer of knowledge about hardware, OSS operating system(s) and Basic-Software (LAMP) belongs to this because this is the only way to ensure the assistance for self-help which is necessary.

The demand, even the hunger for information technology is very large, IT is considered a tool to create new organisations, to improve technical procedures themselves, to make data and collections more transparent and to support the co-operation. There are concrete problems in the lack of connectivity (internet), of course because of a lack of resources in general, but also in education and advanced training. Especially in this area there are convincing examples where libraries from industrialised countries take over sponsorships and implement projects, for example the Oslo University College with a project in Kenya Ms. Unni Knudsen reported about.