



The IFLA-UNESCO partnership 1947-2012

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Abstract

In 1947 IFLA signed a cooperation agreement with the newly created UNESCO. The article reviews the evolution of the relationship between IFLA and UNESCO since 1947, and evaluates what this relationship has contributed to the international library and information community. The review falls into three periods: (1) from 1947 to 1977, when IFLA worked closely with UNESCO's Libraries Division (later the Department of Documentation, Libraries and Archives); (2) from 1977, when the General Information Programme was founded, to 2000, when this Programme was merged with the Intergovernmental Informatics Programme (IIP); and (3) from 2001 to the present time, with particular reference to the UNESCO Information for All Programme (IFAP). As UNESCO gradually shifted its attention away from libraries to documentation and later information society issues, UNESCO's importance to IFLA as a source of support declined, but possibilities remain for fruitful, mutually beneficial relationships between them.

Introduction

In 1947 IFLA held its first Council meeting (i.e. conference) after the suspension of almost all of its activities during the Second World War. In that same year, IFLA signed a cooperation agreement with the newly created United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO. It was the beginning of a period during which IFLA grew from what might have been dismissed as a gentlemen's club of middle-aged library directors to an international body which can claim to represent libraries and librarians worldwide – today's global voice of the library and information profession. The role of UNESCO in setting IFLA on that road and in nurturing its development in the interests of the world's

libraries and library users cannot be underestimated. It is this relationship with UNESCO that today's IFLA session celebrates.

In this paper I review the relationship between IFLA and UNESCO since 1947. I attempt to trace how it has evolved over the last 65 years, to evaluate what this relationship has contributed to the international library and information community, and make some proposals on how it can be promoted.

The literature of international librarianship contains many references to IFLA's programmes, activities, influence and relationships to other bodies, but most of it consists of contemporary accounts of events and activities in which mention of UNESCO is incidental to other matters. Among the more specifically historical accounts are a British master's thesis by De Vries (1976) dealing with the history of IFLA until WW2 and a book edited by Koops and Wieder (1977) to mark IFLA's 50th anniversary. This book includes a substantial historical chapter by Joachim Wieder (1977), whose account was later updated by Harry Campbell (2002) to cover the twenty-five years to 2002. In his book on FAIFE, Alex Byrne (2007) included a concise chapter with a good grasp of broad developmental trends. The most recent source, covering the entire period to date, is Jeffrey Wilhite's (2012) book, *85 years IFLA: a history and a chronology of sessions 1927-2012*.

I must emphasize that the opinions expressed are my own, not those of IFLA.¹

IFLA before UNESCO

IFLA was founded in 1927, almost two decades before UNESCO. It is worth noting that IFLA cultivated a close relationship with the Committee for International Cooperation of the League of Nations (Wieder 1977). This Committee, set up in 1922, can be regarded as the direct predecessor of UNESCO. Because it lacked the resources and status that UNESCO enjoys its impact was much smaller. However, it set up a Subcommittee for Bibliography and convened an annual conference of library directors at its headquarters in Paris. It promoted projects such as the *Index bibliographicus; international catalogue of sources of current bibliographical information* and the *Index translationum*, an international bibliography of translations, which is still published by UNESCO. The Committee also worked on issues such as the training of librarians, promotion of public libraries, international guidelines for inter-library lending, journal title abbreviations and legal deposit legislation (Breycha-Vauthier, 1961). Rayward (1981:462) has argued that the origins of modern bibliographic organization and control at the international level can be traced back to the creation of "an international library and bibliographic community" by the League of Nations Organization for Intellectual Cooperation².

IFLA had another useful link with the League of Nations: through the League of Nations Library in Geneva. In 1929 the Director of that Library, T. P. Sevensma, was appointed as IFLA's Secretary General. Thus IFLA's Secretariat was maintained at the League of Nations Library, in neutral Switzerland, which was later to prove a great advantage when WW2 broke out. The relationship which developed between IFLA and UNESCO after the war was not without precedent.

UNESCO: constructing the defences of peace

UNESCO is an intergovernmental organization established by treaty under public international law, and part of the “United Nations family”. An intergovernmental organization is an association of member states, which are represented at its meetings and in its governance organs by diplomats and other government representatives. The organization culture is formal and tends towards bureaucracy; diplomatic niceties are observed. Parties other than member states may be allowed to observe meetings and may on occasion be invited to speak, briefly. But they speak only when invited. Thus, as an intergovernmental organization (IGO), UNESCO is a quite different kind of organization from IFLA, which is an international nongovernmental organization (INGO) with a membership comprising associations, institutions and personal associates. The culture of an NGO is much less formal. When discussing relations between IFLA and UNESCO we need to bear in mind that they differ vastly in status, magnitude, resources and organization culture.

UNESCO was founded in 1945 with the Mission of contributing to “the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information”, the rationale being that “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.³ This sentiment resonated with librarians who had experienced the horror and destruction of the war.

IFLA and UNESCO: the early period, 1947-1977

The IFLA leaders who set about resuming IFLA’s activities in 1946 lost no time in seeking a relationship with UNESCO. In 1947, at IFLA’s first Council meeting, IFLA president Wilhelm Munthe proposed “an agreement of mutual recognition” between IFLA and UNESCO (Byrne, 2007:42). A formal agreement was signed which

...defined the mutual acceptance of principles, major tasks and objectives of both international bodies, mutual consultation, regular representation at plenary sessions and general conferences, exchange of information, as well as the promotion of IFLA projects in the interest of Unesco’s general programme. In particular, IFLA was officially recognized as the principal organ for Unesco’s cooperation with professional library associations. At the same time Unesco promised financial support for the execution of IFLA’s programme, and more particularly, for specific assignments, meetings, secretarial help or documentary purposes (Wieder, 1977:26).⁴

The support that UNESCO promised (and delivered) to IFLA was motivated by the conviction that libraries were highly relevant to UNESCO’s ideals (Wieder 1977). Edward J. Carter, the first head of UNESCO’s “Libraries Division” saw the functions of UNESCO in respect of libraries as encompassing the development of libraries in developing countries, development of bibliographic services, publication of aids to bibliographic work, and the fostering of international cooperation through aid to international professional associations such as IFLA (Foskett, 1986). UNESCO’s support of IFLA took various forms:

Recognition: UNESCO recognized IFLA as the “peak body” (Byrne, 2007) representing the world’s library community. This gave what was still a very small and not very competent NGO an international status on which it was able to capitalize and grow.

Representation: UNESCO awarded IFLA consultative status, which meant among other things that IFLA was invited as a matter of course to all UNESCO conferences in which library-related issues were discussed. UNESCO undertook to consult IFLA on all relevant policy matters (Wilhite, 2012; Breycha-Vauthier, 1961). In 1961 IFLA was admitted to the highest level of consultative status (A) (Wieder, 1977). IFLA retains consultative status to this day, the relationship having been interrupted only once, for six months in 1972, when IFLA, along with 40 other international NGOs was suspended for failing to act against members that practiced racial segregation or supported *apartheid* (Wilhite, 2012; Byrne, 2007).

Representation also worked in the other direction. From the first post-war Council meeting in 1947 until the present day there has always been a UNESCO session at IFLA's conferences, whether referred to as an "open forum" or "open session" as today – the 65th session in this series. The themes of these sessions have been summarized by Wilhite in his Part 2 of his book, "Chronology of sessions, 1927-2012", which shows that much attention was paid to cooperation with UNESCO, and particularly to work being undertaken by IFLA under contract to UNESCO.

Direct subventions: Financial support came in the form of subventions to help fund IFLA publications (the *Actes* or proceedings of IFLA's meetings as well as a special section of the journal *Libri*, entitled *IFLA communications*, which reported on IFLA activities); certain international conferences and seminars, and administrative costs. The first subvention (1500 Swiss francs) was granted in 1949. The amount gradually increased. By 1962, an increase in the subvention, to US\$ 10.000 (Wilhite, 2012), enabled IFLA to set up its first full-time, permanent secretariat (Byrne, 2007). The subvention continued to increase until it reached US\$ 30.000 in 1972/3 (Wilhite, 2012).

Grant funding: UNESCO awarded IFLA contracts for various professional investigations and development projects, for example, on union catalogues and international cataloguing rules (Breycha-Vauthier, 1961). This was an important source of income and provided a stimulus for the investigation of professional issues and the dissemination of best practice. Campbell (2002:126) mentions that a quite substantial amount of money was still being provided UNESCO by UNESCO in 1998, mainly in the form of grants for professional activities.

Guidance: in the early years particularly, UNESCO helped steer IFLA and helped the organization to develop sound procedures. For example, the head of UNESCO's Libraries Division, E.J. Carter, having observed IFLA's rather cumbersome and inefficient procedures, in 1948 drew up a document, *Notes on the conduct of committee business by correspondence*, for IFLA. The influence of UNESCO, and perhaps more broadly of the international organizations of the UN family, can also be observed in some of IFLA's terminology (for example the term 'focal point' to mean head office) and in IFLA's practice of drawing up "medium-term programmes" (MTPs). This formal and somewhat time-consuming practice was adopted by IFLA in the 1970s and was maintained from 1975 to 2001, when IFLA replaced MTPs with biennial strategic plans.

The period 1947 to 1977 represents the high point in the relationship between IFLA and UNESCO. Their cooperation embraced a wide range of issues, which can be grouped under the following themes:

Coordination: IFLA was not the only international NGO that was supported and nurtured by UNESCO. The International Federation for Documentation (FID), the International Association of Music Libraries (IAML) and the International Council on Archives were also supported. UNESCO encouraged cooperation among these bodies as well as with the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). In 1951 UNESCO convened a joint meeting of their officers to encourage them to coordinate their activities. UNESCO also tried, without success, to create an umbrella body, referred to as an “interprofessional committee” (*comité de liaison*), for this purpose (Wieder, 1977). For many years IFLA and FID held their conferences back-to-back, but relations between them were sometimes strained and never became more than lukewarm (Wilhite, 2012).

Technical library issues: in the early years in particular UNESCO collaborated with IFLA in describing and disseminating best professional practice in respect of functions such as library statistics (Schick, 1977), public library legislation (Gardner, 1971), interlibrary lending, exchange of publications and cataloguing. The exchange of publications was regarded as a very significant international activity in which UNESCO played a leadership role, producing a handbook which provided guidelines for the international exchange of publications generally and of government publications specifically (Thompson, 1974). Cataloguing standards was another priority area for UNESCO, which in conjunction with IFLA convened the well-known International Conference on Cataloguing Principles, held in Paris in 1961 (Wilhite, 2012). The *UNESCO public library manifesto* of 1947 seems to have been a purely UNESCO document; IFLA/UNESCO or UNESCO/IFLA manifestos and guidelines documents making their appearance mainly in the next period.

Developing countries: Promoting library development in developing countries was a priority for UNESCO, as is reflected by the large amount of space devoted to various aspects of this in the *UNESCO bulletin for libraries*. Library seminars were held in the various developing regions: Africa, the Arab states, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean (White, 1970; Kaungamno, 1985; Aguolo and Aguolo, 2001)). UNESCO sent senior librarians as consultants to developing countries (Foskett, 1986) and played a major role in the establishment of library schools in the developing regions (Sabor, 1965; Keresztesi, 1982; Saunders and Saunders, 1994; Johnson, 2008). Of particular relevance here are the UNESCO/IFLA pre-session seminars, held immediately prior to the IFLA conferences starting in 1971. These were aimed at colleagues from developing countries and dealt with progress in the countries represented, developments in international librarianship, the work of international bodies, and “advanced librarianship”, i.e. recent development in various areas of library practice (Chandler, 1972), including technical issues such as bibliographic control, planning, and resource-sharing.

National library and information policies: towards the end of the first period national library and/or information policies emerged as a major theme in UNESCO’s work with libraries, documentation centres and archives. Confusingly, two competing concepts appeared: UNISIST and NATIS. UNISIST, the World Science Information System, arose from a study undertaken by UNESCO’s Science Sector and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) into the feasibility of a world scientific information system. IFLA was represented in the meetings of the ICSU/Unesco Central Committee for UNISIST at which the feasibility study was discussed (Roberts, 1973). The *UNISIST study* report was published in 1971 (Vickery and Brown, 1977; Parker, 1985; Bliss, 1993). The concept of NATIS (National Information Systems) arose within the Communications Section from the regional conferences organized by Victor Penna in a number of developing regions and took shape at

an Inter-Governmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures held in Paris in 1974 (Foskett, 1986), at which IFLA was represented (Wilhite, 2012). There was a good deal of contemporary literature on the NATIS and UNISIST concepts, much of it mildly positive or non-committal (e.g. Lorenz, 1977; Kaunganno, 1985). Foskett (1986) reflected on some dissatisfaction about the separation between the two. Alemna (1995) pointed out that little had been achieved under NATIS in Africa, but attributed this to problems on the ground, specifically a lack of coordination at the national level between archives, libraries and documentation centres. Sturges and Neill (1998), however, were less charitable. Also citing Parker (1985), they produced a scathing indictment of the duplication and general ineffectiveness of these programmes, at least in Africa, and lamented:

A verdict from the 1990s would be that Africa's library professionals spent well over a decade in debating, discussing and writing about these programmes, when their energy and efforts would have been better expended in continuing to grapple with the multitude of everyday problems that beset their services...

It has been pointed out that both UNISIST and NATIS had some positive outcomes. UNISIST gave birth to the International Serials Data System (ISDS) which today still administers the international standard serials number (ISSN), while UNESCO endorsed the IFLA programme of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) at its founding Intergovernmental Conference in 1974 (Anderson, 2000). The programme of Universal Availability of Publications (UAP), which was closely associated with UNISIST, also originated during this period. These developments, however, take us to the next period in the relationship between IFLA and UNESCO.

A general impression from the first three decades of this relationship is that as UNESCO's emphasis gradually shifted towards documentation (what would later be called information science) during the latter half of this period, libraries took a less central position. In 1966 the Libraries Division of UNESCO's Department of Cultural Activities became the Department of Documentation, Libraries and Archives, in the Communication Sector (Coops, 1972). Coops, who was employed by UNESCO, represented this as an elevation in status, from division to a separate department, but it was not lost on librarians that libraries were now subsumed in a larger group (cf. Wilhite, 2012).

The General Information Programme (PGI: Programme Général de l'Information) (1977-2000)

It is appropriate to set 1977 as the boundary between the first two periods in the relationship between IFLA and UNESCO. It was the year of IFLA's 50th anniversary, which was accompanied by the publication of an anniversary volume (Koops & Wieder, 1977) reflecting on IFLA's past and future. It was also the year in which UNESCO's General Information Programme was established. This programme is better known by its French acronym, PGI, for Programme Général de l'Information, which is how I refer to it below. The creation of the PGI followed increasing concern about the duplication evident in the two competing UNESCO programmes of UNISIST and NATIS. There was unhappiness among librarians about the separation of science documentation from libraries, as it implied that libraries were mainly concerned with the humanities and not with science and technology. This had not been

the position of the former Division of Documentation, Libraries and Archives (Foskett, 1986). A number of parties, including some Member States, brought pressure to bear on UNESCO to remedy this situation. The result was a proposal by UNESCO's Director-General to combine the two programmes and harmonize various elements where there was a need for coordination, for example, UBC (under NATIS) and the ISDS (under UNISIST). This led to a decision taken at UNESCO's General Conference in Nairobi in 1976 to create the PGI by reorganizing and regrouping the activities relating to these two programmes (Gray, 1979; Kaungamno, 1985).

Gray (1979:21) summarized the content of the PGI as consisting of four major parts:

- Promoting the formulation of national and regional policies and plans
- Promoting the establishment and application of methods, norms and standards
- Contributing to the development of information infrastructure
- Promoting the education and training of information specialists and information users

All the activities described under the previous period can be accommodated as part of this list of content, but one notices that the word "information" has replaced libraries, archives and documentation as the key word. In 1978, not long after the creation of the PGI, the bimonthly *UNESCO bulletin for libraries* was replaced by a somewhat more scholarly quarterly journal, the *Unesco journal of information science, librarianship and archives administration*, which ceased publication in 1983 (Wilhite, 2012).

In an article in *IFLA journal*, Tocatlian and Abid (1986) provided an overview of the activities of the PGI as they related to the needs of developing countries and stated that

Unesco's principal long-term goal in the field of libraries and information is to assist the developing countries in building up the basic facilities needed to offer the best possible service to information users of every type, everywhere, and to enable these countries to participate in regional and international information systems." (p.280)

They further reported that, following the merger, the scope of UNISIST, which been originally been limited to science and technology, was extended to all fields of information. However, they made no mention of NATIS. In the 'competition' between NATIS and UNISIST, the latter seems to have won out. It continued to be referred to frequently. As late as 1993 Bliss wrote glowingly about UNISIST: "UNISIST provides an excellent example of the interconnectedness not only of information and information formats but also of information systems" (Bliss, 1993:49).

Activities of the PGI emphasized assistance to developing countries, The assistance included training and the creation of regional cooperation networks with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and, in the case of Africa, with the help of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), which administered the ambitious but ill-fated Pan African Documentation and Information System (PADIS) (Tocatlian and Abid, 1986; Sturges and Neill, 1998). In addition, the PGI supported projects relating to the formulation and application of standards, integrated library and information services projects, national information policies and infrastructures, conservation and preservation, and bibliographic control. Assistance was also provided to member states needing specific assistance for the creation and improvement of library and information services (Tocatlian and Abid, 1986). Mention should be made here of the CDS/ISIS (Computerised Documentation Service /

Integrated Set of Information Systems) software package for information storage and retrieval that was developed by UNESCO and since 1985 has been distributed under free licences, particularly to documentation centres and smaller libraries in developing countries, where consequently it has been widely used (Hopkinson, 2005; Abboy and Hoskins, 2008). Judging by the literature IFLA has shown little interest in CDS/ISIS, although the former IFLA UBCIM core programme paid some attention to the use of the UNIMARC format in CDS/ISIS (Plassard 1993).

The PGI continued to provide subventions to IFLA, FID and ICA. The subvention to IFLA had been fixed at \$30.000 in 1972/3. It continued at this level until it was terminated in 1995 (Wilhite 2012). Thus the disappearance of NATIS did not signify a lack of interest in library matters on the part of the PGI. In particular, the PGI worked closely with IFLA on two of IFLA's core programmes: UBC and UAP, both of which had their origins in IFLA.

UBC (Universal Bibliographic Control) originated in an International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts held in Copenhagen in 1969, which led to the establishment of an IFLA Cataloguing Secretariat in 1971 (Anderson, 2000). A working document, *Universal Bibliographic Control: a long term policy, a plan for action* (Anderson, 1974) was presented by IFLA at the 1974 Intergovernmental Conference referred to earlier, which laid the basis for NATIS. The basis of UBC was the creation of an international network of national bibliographic agencies and systems: national bibliographic agencies, relying on national legal deposit legislation, would be responsible for recording their countries' publications and would produce compatible bibliographic records, to be exchanged internationally by means of compatible machine-readable records. An international UBC office was established at the British Library in London, and this was supervised by a Steering Committee and an Advisory Committee, under the aegis of the IFLA Executive Board⁵ (Lorenz, 1977). Wilhite's (2012) summaries of UNESCO sessions at IFLA conferences during the 1970s provide evidence of UNESCO's involvement in UBC through the funding of projects, international conferences and the Programme itself. The need for compatible machine-readable bibliographic records gave rise to the development of the universal MARC format (UNIMARC), a MARC version designed for international exchange, under the aegis of IFLA's International Marc Programme. In 1987 the UBC Programme and the International MARC programme were merged to form the Universal Bibliographic Control and International MARC (UBCIM) programme, when its office was moved to the Deutsche Bibliothek in Frankfurt am Main (Parent, 2004). UNIMARC was widely used as the basis for national bibliographic record formats.

IFLA's core programme of Universal Availability of Publications (UAP) developed in the late 1970s from work by Donald Urquhart and Maurice Line (Plassard, 1987) and was promoted in numerous conference papers and articles, such as several by Line in the *UNESCO bulletin for libraries* (e.g. Line, 1977). IFLA's Office for International Lending (OIL) had been set up in 1973 at what later became the British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC) in Boston Spa, England, with support from the British Library (Campbell, 2002; IFLA, 2003). Under the leadership of Line, an Office for UAP developed alongside OIL. In 1980, UAP was recognized as IFLA's second IFLA core programme (IFLA, 2003). The reasoning behind UAP was as follows:

The aim of the new Core Programme for UAP was to improve access to published material, whether this meant improving local publishing and distribution patterns in developing countries; identification of effective strategies for the retention of last copies for preservation

purposes; transfer of documents across national boundaries; or the traditional means of sharing library resources, good old interlibrary loan (IFLA, 2003).

In 1982 an International Congress on UAP, which attracted participants from 64 UNESCO member states, took place in Paris under the aegis of IFLA, PGI and UNISIST to promote the concept and aims of UAP. The Conference was followed by more than twenty UAP seminars and conferences held in various parts of the world. More than fifty guidelines, conference reports and research reports were published between 1978 and 2001, many of them with funding from UNESCO (Plassard, 1987). They are listed in a report published on IFLANET in 2003 (IFLA, 2003) Many of these publications appeared under the imprint of the “General Information Programme and UNISIST”. During the 1980s the UAP programme developed the IFLA Voucher Scheme for international interlibrary lending and an IFLA Twinning Database, and worked with the Copyright Office of the British Library on various intellectual property issues affecting international lending (Gould and Watkins, 1988).

Another IFLA core programme which enjoyed the support of UNESCO was the Preservation and Conservation (PAC) programme, which was launched in Vienna during the 1986 Conference on the Preservation of Library materials, sponsored by CDNL with IFLA and UNESCO (Campbell, 2002). With the ongoing support of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, PAC continues to function as an IFLA core activity.

It is noteworthy that, although UNESCO had a hand in the initiatives that gave rise to these core programmes and provided significant funding for projects related to them, major support for them came from a range of other organizations. In the case of UAP these included the United States National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, Verlag Dokumentation Saur, the US Council on Library Resources, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and a number of national libraries (Plassard, 1987). The IFLA core programmes that developed during this period were, with one exception, hosted by national libraries, and national libraries have continued to provide significant support since then. This suggests a shift away from total reliance on UNESCO to a broader support base. It is also during this period that two of UNESCO’s most important members withdrew from the Organization due to what they saw as poor management and the over-politicisation of certain programmes (Foskett, 1986). The withdrawal of the United States in 1985 and the United Kingdom in 1987 represented a significant loss of income and led to a reduction of UNESCO’s activities.^{6, 7}

In 1990 the Division of the General Information Programme became part of a newly created UNESCO Sector, the Sector for Communication, Information and Informatics (CII). During the 1990s UNESCO became increasingly oriented towards the “information field” and developed

...an elaborate concept for its engagement in the field of scientific and technical information institutions, libraries, documentation centres, records and archival management and the interconnection of information systems at national, regional and international levels” (Plathe, 1990, p. 219).

In the PGI emphasis was placed on access to information, its management, and its effective use. The discourse was changing. Libraries, although often present by implication in programmes and projects, became less visible in UNESCO’s medium term programmes and in the long-term strategic plan of the PGI.

Nevertheless, UNESCO-IFLA collaboration continued on a range of projects and the UNESCO subvention to IFLA was not ended until 1995. During this period two important sets of library manifestos and guidelines, developed by IFLA sections and ratified by the IFLA Executive Board were submitted to UNESCO for formal endorsement by that body's General Conference. Such endorsement was followed by seminars held with UNESCO support in various parts of the world to promote adoption of the principles and practices promulgated in them. In 1994 an updated version of the *IFLA/UNESCO public library manifesto*⁸ was published. This was followed by conferences and seminars organized by IFLA in many parts of the world. IFLA's *School library manifesto*⁹ was ratified by the UNESCO General Conference in 1999. In 2001 IFLA's Public Libraries Section published new guidelines and standards for public libraries, *The public library service: the IFLA/UNESCO guidelines for development*. The *IFLA/UNESCO school library guidelines* were published in 2002. Although they did not meet with universal uncritical approval (e.g. Neri, 2009), these documents were influential in developing countries (Campbell, 2002; Rosetto, 2006). During the PGI period UNESCO published a number of other guidelines on various library and information issues, the research generally being undertaken by authors commissioned by IFLA under contract to the PGI, for example *Guidelines for national libraries* (Sylvestre, 1987), *The role of national libraries in the new information environment* (Cornish, 1991), and *Guidelines on library twinning* (Doyle and Scarry, 1994). Work on national information policies also continued, as illustrated by Montviloff's (1990) handbook, *National library policies*.

Two major UNESCO projects that were launched during this period deserve mention. The new Bibliotheca Alexandrina, inaugurated in 2002, was the result of an ambitious project started in 1986 and an architectural competition held under the auspices of UNESCO (Tocatlian, 2003). IFLA does not appear to have played a notable role in this project. However, IFLA and its sister organization, the ICA, do play a special role in Memory of the World programme, established in 1992 in response to growing concern about the loss of documentary heritage due to war, looting, illegal trading and neglect.¹⁰ IFLA and the ICA are represented on the International Advisory Committee for the programme, which recommends documentary heritage of international significance for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register. IFLA has also contributed expertise in the development of guidelines and criteria for the programme (Byrne, 2008).

In the late 1990s a need both to conserve funds and "...to establish synergies necessary to adapt UNESCO's activities to the challenges of the information highways..." (UNESCO, 1998: 1) led to a decision taken by UNESCO's Executive Board in 2000 to terminate the PGI and merge it with the Intergovernmental Informatics Programme (IIP). This gave rise to the creation of the Information for All Programme (IFAP) in 2001.

UNESCO and IFLA since 2000

The Information for All Programme (IFAP) was established by UNESCO in 2001 with a mandate to

...be a key participant in the fulfilment of UNESCO's mandate to contribute to "education for all", to the "free exchange of ideas and knowledge" and to "increase the means of communication between peoples" (UNESCO, 2000, p.14).

It was also expected to “contribute to narrowing the gap between the information rich and the information poor”, to work on “all aspects of access to and management of information”, to work with all UNESCO sectors and to cooperate with other United Nations bodies. The Executive Board also stipulated that “[b]ecause of its transdisciplinary nature, the programme shall give priority to working with all UNESCO sectors in the adaptation of ICT to their activities” (UNESCO, 2000, p.16). Although there was a reference to “key institutions, such as archives, libraries and other information centres” (p.16), no mention was made of libraries or archives in the “mandate”, “programme objectives” and “main programme areas” set out for IFAP (pp. 16-19). Throughout, there was heavy emphasis on information. Libraries, presumably, were subsumed under “communication, information and informatics” (p.17).

Given the huge scope allocated to it, IFAP was woefully under-resourced. By 2006 it was clear that IFAP was not fulfilling the high expectations that had been held when it was launched. An external evaluation (Gurstein and Taylor, 2007) was commissioned. The evaluators found that although IFAP had achieved some successes, “IFAP’s accomplishments in the six years since its establishment in 2001 have been limited” (p.7). The evaluators were particularly perturbed by IFAP’s lack of visibility during the process leading up to the World Summit on the Information Society and at the two summits, which is where a major input would have been expected from IFAP. The lack of success was attributed to lack of clarity on IFAP’s mandate, its cumbersome governance structure, and lack of financial and human resources, with a concomitant inability to monitor the projects it funded and to respond to the rapidly evolving policy, institutional and technological framework within which it had to operate (Gurstein and Taylor, 2007).¹¹

In response to the evaluation report a strategic plan was drafted in which a recommendation was made to “mainstream the programme” and eliminate the need for a separate IFAP Council” (UNESCO Information for All Programme, 2008, pp.32-34). The rationale for this was that information for all should be an integral part of UNESCO’s regular programme and budget and that no separate structure for it should be necessary. This idea was rejected by the IFAP Council. Instead, a renewed attempt was made to give more substance to IFAP. Starting in 2008, IFAP paid significant attention to the formulation of national information policy, preparing a template for such policies, setting up online IFAP Information Society Observatory¹², and publishing the first issue of an annual report, *Information Society Policies. Annual World Report 2009* (Rab, 2009). Information literacy also receives much attention (Catts and Lau, 2008; Horton, 2008) and IFAP has issued reports on such issues as language diversity in cyberspace (Diki-Kidiri, 2007) and ethical implications of emerging technologies (Rundle & Conley, 2007).

The UNESCO Director General’s report on IFAP in 2012 referred to increased staff support and progress in implementing IFAP’s strategic plan, but again pointed out that IFAP does not have enough human and financial resources and called on member states to increase their “extrabudgetary contributions” to IFAP (UNESCO Information for All Programme, 2012, p. 3). It is a sad reflection on UNESCO’s funding priorities that in an era which is variously described as the information age, the information economy, the information society, or the knowledge society, the only unit within UNESCO which is entirely dedicated to this area is not part of the regular UNESCO line unit, but remains classified as an “intergovernmental programme” that must rely to a significant extent on voluntary donations from member states.

Nevertheless, from this most recent report it is clear that IFAP is making a useful contribution in its five priority areas:

- Information for development
- Information literacy
- Information preservation
- Information ethics
- Information accessibility¹³

Thus, although libraries are not often mentioned by name, much of the work of IFAP is of interest to librarians and to IFLA as a Federation. In terms of its consultative status, IFLA sends observers to the IFAP Council meetings. UNESCO's *Charter on the preservation of digital heritage* (UNESCO, 2003) was compiled with inputs from IFLA. IFLA contributes expertise, for example to worldwide information literacy initiatives. IFLA also collaborates with IFAP in follow-up work arising from the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), specifically in respect of certain of the eleven "action lines" described in the Geneva *Plan of action* (WSIS, 2003), which are of particular interest to the international LIS community (Lor, 2008).

In recent years IFAP's level of activity has increased noticeably. However, it my general impression that at this stage IFAP does not enjoy a high level of recognition among IFLA members.

In the mean time, many changes were taking place in IFLA. Some of the former core activities were terminated while others became "core activities". Both the UBCIM and UAP core programmes were terminated by IFLA in 2003, not only due to financial constraints but in the light of new priorities and the need for new models. Both had a major impact which endures to the present (Parent, 2004). IFLA's remaining core programmes became core *activities*. The UBCIM programme was replaced by a new group formed by a partnership between IFLA and the Conference of Directors of National Libraries (CDNL) to form the IFLA CDNL Alliance for Bibliographic Standards (ICABS), subsequently renamed IFLA-CDNL Alliance for Digital Strategies (ICADS). The National Library of Portugal took over the UBCIM's UNIMARC activities (Parent, 2004). ICADS was terminated in 2012. This reflects a move away from the more "library-technical" activities towards advocacy on broader and more strategic information and knowledge society policy issues, as represented by two of the surviving core activities, FAIFE (Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression) and CLM (Committee on Copyright and other Legal Matters).

Much attention has been paid here to IFAP, as the ultimate successor to the original UNESCO Libraries Department. However, the Communication and Information Sector of UNESCO is not limited to IFAP. It consists of two main parts, the Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development, and the Knowledge Societies Division (formerly known as the Information Society Division), which comprises the Section for ICT in Education, Science and Culture and the Section for Universal Access and Preservation, and the IFAP Secretariat. The web page of the Knowledge Societies Division lists the following themes:

- Access for people with disabilities
- Archives
- Free and Open Source Software
- Gender

- HIV and AIDS
- ICT for Education, Science and Culture
- Information Literacy
- Information for All Programme
- Internet Governance
- Libraries
- Linguistic diversity on Internet
- Open access to scientific information
- Open educational resources
- Preservation of documentary heritage
- World Summit on the Information Society¹⁴

Clearly, many if not all of these are relevant to IFLA. But it is not easy to determine where the boundary lies between the activities of these substantive sections of the Knowledge Societies Division and the activities of IFAP as an inter-governmental programme. There appears to be considerable overlap. However, it is worth noting that libraries and archives are specifically referred to in this list. Thus IFLA needs to remain alert to possibly relevant activities which do not fall within the ambit of IFAP.

Up to this point I have touched on the activities of only one of UNESCO's five "sectors" or "major programmes", namely Communication and Information. However, the other four (Education, Science, Social and Human Sciences, and Culture) should not be overlooked. Libraries and information services are relevant to all domains of human endeavour, and we should be more visible in the other four sectors too. Unfortunately, UNESCO tends to compartmentalize its activities into "silos". In UNESCO IFLA has usually been pigeonholed in what is now the Communication and Information Sector. In fact, IFLA's relationship with UNESCO is not limited to that sector. In particular, IFLA has a long-standing relationship with UNESCO's Culture Sector. IFLA is a member of the International Committee of the Blue Shield, established in 1996 to assist in the protection of the world's cultural heritage when it is threatened by armed conflict and natural disasters (Varlamoff, 1999; Koch, 2003). This Committee is recognized in terms of the Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.¹⁵ Since 2001 the Culture Sector has managed the World Book Capital City programme, in which the title of "world book capital" is bestowed for a year on a city which excels as a centre of writing, book production and reading, and which will present a large number of events to celebrate this. IFLA has a representative on the nominating committee for this honour.¹⁶ IFLA has also contributed to the adjudicating panel of the Culture Sector's Creative Cities Network.¹⁷

Finally, mention should be made of IFLA's cooperation with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and ISO to revise the 1986 UNESCO framework for cultural statistics and related statistics with a view to developing a new international system for collecting reliable and internationally comparable data on libraries (Ellis, Heaney, Meunier and Poll, 2009).

Conclusion

Reading reports on IFLA activities from the 1940s through 1980s, one cannot but be struck by how frequently UNESCO is mentioned in relation to subventions, contracts for projects, sponsorship for conferences and publications. Writing in 1980 about the “international library and bibliographic community”, Rayward (1981) stated that

Although the members or parts of the international bibliographic and library community are independent, all share common goals, seek to cooperate, and communicate regularly and formally.

Above all, either they turn for direction to a common center, or this center deliberately reaches out to bring them within the orbit of its influence. The center nowadays is UNESCO. (p.453)

Today this is no longer true. UNESCO has shifted its focus away from bibliography and libraries, towards broader issues of the information society or knowledge societies. In any case, UNESCO no longer plays the central role in this environment that it once did. There are various possible reasons for this.

First, UNESCO lacks the resources to exercise such an influence – according to the proverb, he who pays the piper, calls the tune; conversely, one without money cannot tell the piper what to play.

A second reason is that the library and bibliographic universe has become far more dependent on the markets, so that industry trends and industry standards exert more influence. I venture to say that OCLC today exerts more influence on bibliographical matters than does UNESCO. The dominance of the US-based MARC format and the decline of national MARC formats and UNIMARC, and the widespread international use of the Library of Congress Classification and the Dewey Decimal Classification, in spite of their American bias and antiquated structure, are examples illustrating the dominance of industry standards.

Third, there are more players and more sources of information and influence. One thinks of OCLC, WSIS, the Internet Governance Forum, the International Internet Preservation Consortium, the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and the open access movement, the European Union and its various programmes (Europeana, the Bologna Process, etc.), the International Network for Access to Scientific publications (INASP), Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), not to mention IFLA’s own core activities. In their respective spheres these often carry more weight.

Fourth, the pace of innovation is far too rapid, and UNESCO, as an intergovernmental organization with cumbersome decision-making and budgeting processes, has difficulty staying ahead of the technological development affecting our field.

Finally, the world is far more connected today than it was in the 1980s. Through the Internet librarians in even the smallest and least developed countries can gain information about library and information service innovations and best practice without having to depend to the same extent on the seminars and workshops, documentation, publications and expert consultants which made UNESCO the development hub and clearinghouse in earlier times.

That said, UNESCO has played a very significant role in growing the international system of library and information services that we know today. Its own relative decline as a centre of influence is evidence of this success. Owens & Davis (2001) commented: “The reduction of UNESCO’s direct support of IFLA programs in the 1990s indicated a maturation of the latter’s presence in the professional environment” (p.222). IFLA no longer depends on UNESCO, in large part because UNESCO was successful in nurturing and supporting IFLA when this was needed.

This does not mean that there are no longer possibilities for fruitful, mutually beneficial relationships between IFLA and UNESCO. I believe that these possibilities have become more real in recent years. IFAP has enjoyed several years of excellent leadership and is now on a more solid basis. On a broader canvas, UNESCO’s shift away from the information society to the knowledge society or knowledge societies (Gurstein and Taylor, 2007) may signal the end of a long period of technological determinism, the belief that all human problems can be solved by technology, mainly information technology. It may be that UNESCO is moving towards a more multi-faceted and holistic approach. This would be more congenial to libraries, as inclusive community knowledge and heritage institutions rather than dispensers of information packages.

Thus there is still much to be gained by engaging with UNESCO. Librarians should raise awareness within UNESCO of the value and role of libraries by participating in their country’s National Commission for UNESCO to ensure that information and library matters are addressed there. There should be at least one librarian in every national UNESCO commission. Librarians should participate in the work of their country’s National IFAP Committee. If there is no such committee yet, they should help set one up in collaboration with other IFLA members in their country. The Russian National IFAP Committee sets a fine example, conducting an extensive programme of work and producing an impressive number of publications.¹⁸ IFAP has produced a document on how to set up such a committee.¹⁹

Finally, IFLA itself needs to break out of the “Information Society” pigeonhole in which it has been placed in UNESCO, and to build relationships with relevant sections in the other UNESCO major programmes, to each of which libraries are relevant.

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¹ I thank Wiebke Dalhoff, who enlisted me to fill this slot and provided me with some useful sources of information, including a preview of Jeffrey Wilhite's forthcoming book, *85 years IFLA: a history and a chronology of sessions 1927-2012*.

² The League of Nations Organization for Intellectual Cooperation is the name given to the combination of the Committee for Intellectual Cooperation and the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation”, also known as the Paris Institute, sponsored by the French government and inaugurated in 1926 (Rayward, 1981).

³ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001473/147330e.pdf>

⁴ UNESCO has for some time insisted that its acronym be spelled using capital letters, but this was not always the case. In quotations and bibliographic references I have followed the spelling used in the relevant documents.

⁵ The Executive Board was the predecessor of IFLA’s current Governing Board.

⁶ The UK rejoined UNESCO in 1997, the USA in 2003. Singapore had also left UNESCO, in 1985, and rejoined in 2007.

⁷ This was neither the first nor the last time the United States used its financial muscle to exert pressure on UNESCO. UNESCO admitted Palestine to its membership in 2011. A law passed in the USA in 1990 which bars the US from funding any UN agency "which accords the Palestine Liberation Organisation the same standing as member states" effectively cut off US funding to UNESCO, which amounted to about 22% of UNESCO’s income (‘U.S. withholds funding to UNESCO based on Palestinian membership’, PBS Newshour, November 1, 2011, available <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2011/11/unesco-funding.html>.)

⁸ Published by UNESCO as the UNESCO/IFLA public library manifesto, available http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=4638&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

⁹ Published by UNESCO as the UNESCO/IFLA school library manifesto, available http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=4646&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

¹⁰ Memory of the World: programme background, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/flagship-project-activities/memory-of-the-world/about-the-programme/>, accessed 2012-08-04.

¹¹ It is not improbable that political manoeuvring was at least partly responsible for the poor resourcing which handicapped IFAP. Attending IFAP’s Intergovernmental Council meetings as an observer during the period 2005-2008, I gained a distinct impression that the United States and certain of its allies had little sympathy for IFAP and would have preferred to see the programme terminated.

¹² <http://ifap-is-observatory.itk.hu/>

¹³ (Information for All Programme (IFAP): <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/intergovernmental-programmes/information-for-all-programme-ifap/priorities/>, accessed 2012-08-04)

¹⁴ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/about-us/who-we-are/whos-who/knowledge-societies-division-ksd/>

¹⁵ http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=35261&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

¹⁶ http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=24019&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

¹⁷ http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Creative_cities_brochure_en.pdf

¹⁸ <http://www.ifapcom.ru/en/>

¹⁹ This document is available on IFAP’s web page, but at the time of writing could not be downloaded.