



International Federation of  
Library Associations and Institutions

## Section on Government Information and Official Publications

### **NEWSLETTER** **October 2000**

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#### **1. Introduction**

The GIOPS Online Newsletter is intended as a brief update to all on achievements and on progress made by the Section. This issue focuses on one of the important decisions of the Jerusalem Conference GIOPS Meetings, the amendment and approval of the GIOPS Draft Position Paper, *Means of Deposit and Exchange of Public Documents and Information in Countries Without Fully Developed Information Infrastructures*. The approved text is given in full and it is hoped, through feedback and co-operation from all members, to develop this position paper into a strategy approved by IFLA for world-wide implementation to preserve the memories of nations.

Following the text of the Position Paper is a short Section entitled *The GIOPS Year in Brief* which gives the Highlights of our upcoming Annual Report..

#### **2 . GIOPS Position Paper, as Approved by GIOPS, Jerusalem, 2000**

##### **Means of Deposit and Exchange of Public Documents and Information in Countries Without Fully Developed Information Infrastructures.**

#### **The Vision**

The basic motivation in the global economic environment is that at the very least each nation stands to gain if it provides information about itself to every other nation. As information is increasingly considered a strategic commodity and resource, there is a tendency to restrict information within borders, within technologies. In the global village, however, public

information should be universally accessible to the citizens of all developed and developing countries to ensure basic human rights, opportunity, enlightenment and education. Information exchange may be through bilateral agreements, where each government provides information to every other government directly, or multilateral within the context of international cooperation. This distribution and dissemination may also be through public international agencies which collect and further disseminate the information resources. Depository libraries play a major role in this information collection and dissemination chain.

**Underlying Principles of Access to Public Domestic and International Information** The foundation pillars of access are i) equity or equality of access; ii) public information treated as a public good; iii) maintenance of public current and historical records as a public trust, and iv) government accountability to its citizenry. The concept of public good also calls governments to refrain from charging citizens for services for which their tax dollars have already paid. Citizens, under this concept, must not pay again and again for the same information collected and generated by government. Equality of access also implies matching the means to access with distribution vehicles suitable to all citizens, regardless of their abilities, skill sets, access to technology, financial or personal status. Internationally, this means ensuring that countries respect each others limitations and infrastructures whenever and wherever possible. To have both current and historical public information, preservation of the present documentation and publications is not only essential but mandatory.

**Defining a Fully Developed Information Infrastructure** One may define a fully developed information infrastructure as one which allows each citizen the same level of access to information, regardless of resources, location, educational level or local technology. Internationally this means that the citizens of one country would have the same level of access as the citizen with the greatest level of access from any other country. While not perfect, deposit and exchange agreements and programs have evolved to meet this need and provide the greatest measure of equality of access possible.

**Background** Library deposit and exchange programs are contractual agreements between parties for access. Normally in return for receiving the material, national and international depository libraries agree to make the information freely available to the public in their area. The role of official deposit and exchange in an international environment is normally much broader, with large resource libraries assuming responsibilities for selecting, maintaining, organizing, providing readers services and dissemination extending to national or regional boundaries. On-site access is normally provided free of charge and other services at cost in accordance with individual depository library programs and agreements. They may vary in direct proportion to available resources.

## **Evolving Trends**

1. Business models are being introduced through out public institutions around the world. Managements are under pressure to cut budgets and show efficiencies. It is suspected by many that short term benefits are given priority over the long-term public good. Business models are being implemented in public institutions to introduce more cost-effective programs. Some of the models, such as cost-recovery, just-in-time delivery, low publications warehousing inventories and least cost methods may not be in the best public interest. There may, for example, be no means to purchase pre-1990 publications, discarded in cost savings measures because they are not purchased as frequently and warehousing costs are high.

2. Technology is allowing for easier accessibility and dissemination of information for a variety of publics due to an apparent low-cost dissemination via the internet. (Publishing via the internet appears to be cheaper than publishing by paper, but not all costs, computers, internet interfaces, are factored into the equation.) The trend among more technologically advanced nations and institutions, and national and international public organizations and agencies is to publish almost exclusively using Internet and CD-ROM technology. Many documents are available only in electronic formats. Detailed end-user needs analyses seem rare but nevertheless print publications are increasingly being discontinued and sometimes are replaced with web versions. Frequently there is no public announcement to recipients and subscribers. Electronic and CD-ROM versions are frequently excluded from depository library distributions.
3. Organizations with publications targeted for the developing world may not be reaching it. World statistics for internet usage show averages of 1 out of every 4 to 6 people with access in developed countries and 1 out of every 500-10,000 people with access in developing countries. A relatively recent UNDP report notes South Asia has 23% of the world's population and only 0.04% of this South Asian population has access to Internet. The same report cites success stories resulting from a detailed needs analysis at the village level.
4. The most comprehensive recent study of African University libraries (1997) shows none with internet access and all with high technology and communications costs. At the same time the proportion of funding for University education is decreasing and the proportion of funding for updating the library collection decreasing at an even greater rate.
5. A recent informal survey of state and provincial government sites showed many cyclical links under various categories, almost all leading to very few full text publications and segments thereof.
6. Conservation and preservation is being used as a major reason for digitization, whereas no archiving standards currently exist for electronic documents. With technology constantly changing there is no assured preservation path for electronic resources. The major benefit is that of more widespread access to that portion of the public with good internet access.
7. Public information is being sold to and/or published by private concerns which retain copyright and which charge for access. Electronic data aggregations are often sold for up to 50 times more than separate print compilations. The public has (through taxes) paid for data collection and aggregation and for the support of national and international organizations. It is unfair to ask the public to pay again. Furthermore, some of the requesters may not be able to pay. They may comprise the segment of the population in greatest need of the information.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **It is recommended**

- i) that GIOPS strive to sensitize all IFLA members to the dangers of disappearing public information resources and erosion in the means of ensuring equality of access, specifically that in the context of downsizing many deposit and exchange programs are being downsized and/or discontinued;
- ii) that GIOPS identify and support structures which re-emphasize the importance of deposit and exchanges in electronic and hard copy format, with paper and microfiche remaining the preferred archival mediums;
- iii) that GIOPS identify the impact of commercial concerns upon the availability of free public international information to citizens, especially to the developing countries;

- iv) that GIOPS further work with national and international bodies to foster an understanding of the lack of permanence of electronic information, the nature of the electronic document and the need for archival quality paper deposit until a viable alternative is identified;
- v) that GIOPS seek ways to educate all parties to the conditions required for effective public depository programs and services with a view to securing support and further promote and publicize the value and merit of public depository programs and services;
- vi) that GIOPS continue to train users to maximize the use of the full range of information products and services, print (paper), web-based and electronic, including those available through exchange and public depository programs and services;
- vii) that GIOPS liaise with depository programs around the world and work with them to promote and foster the continued deposit and exchange of government information in all formats; and
- viii) that GIOPS seek to promote the establishment of the deposit and exchange of electronic files to ensure permanent world wide preservation and access to Internet based resources.

#### References:

- i. United Nations Development Report 1999. Ten Years of Human Development. At <http://www.undp.org/hdro/contents.html>. Consulted 21/07/99; 12/10/99; 09/08/00.
- ii. University Libraries in Africa: a review of their current state and future potential, by Diana Rosenberg and others. International African Institute, London, 1997. 3 vols.

**3. The GIOPS Year in Brief** The highlight of the year was the Jerusalem IFLA Conference where GIOPS achievements were reviewed, important decisions were made and the paths for the future discussed and prioritized. The Minutes may be read at <http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s2/govinfo.htm>. The brief highlights of discussions and the activities of the year are given below.

The Conferences Subcommittee reviewed the logistics of a satellite pre-conference, possibly in Ottawa, possibly in collaboration with Parliamentary Libraries. The Committee was in favour of such collaboration.

The Publications Subcommittee reported on the May 1999 Moscow seminar and the website on which the English language and Russian papers appear. (Until edited and finalized, the draft version of the conference papers may be read the by going to <http://www.rsl.ru> , select News and Events, then select May 1999 Conference. Be sure to select English language text.)

The Directory update was provided by Helen Sheehy. Many questionnaires were sent out and numerous responses received from around the world. After proof-reading and finalizing we will contact IFLA with regard to hosting the Directory on IFLANET.

For the Seminars Subcommittee Bruno Gnassi reported that the discussion and plans for an Arab Seminar were proposed for deferral until a future conference.

Bruno Gnassi reported on renewed interest in the GIOPS Discussion Group and it already has a listserv up and running in Canada. In October 2000 a group of interested individuals met to discuss this further.

Jane Wu reported on the finished report "Means of Deposit and Exchange of Public Documents and Information in Countries Without Fully Developed Information Infrastructures". After minimal discussion the Committee voted to approve the position paper in principle and to followup the recommendations via discussion on our listserv. We discovered it was possible to post our position paper on the GIOPS IFLANET to solicit comments. It was also suggested it may be possible to publish the paper in the IFLA JOURNAL.

The original 1983 paper defining an Official Government Publication was rewritten and updated by Johannes Metz. Bruno Gnassi, Emma Voskanian , Johannes Metz and Sandra DaConturbia volunteered to review the document prior to placement on IFLANET.

The Copyright position paper issue was tabled for discussion at a future conference.

For the Eastern European Development Committee, Frank Kirkwood stated that there has been little progress other than the fact that a listserv has been established. The four resolutions from the 1999 conference have been sent forth. Frank also reported that IFLA involvement in a regional followup meeting to the annual St. Petersburg conference would be beneficial. Further, he noted the Russian Library Association is interested in establishing a section on GIOPS.

Elections to IFLA Standing Committees will take place from January through the end of February 2001. At the second Boston 2001 meeting, Sandra DaConturbia, Jerry Mansfield and Johannes Metz will leave GIOPS after having served eight years. Rob Brian will be retiring from librarianship and thus reported that he will not be standing up for re-election. Thus, we have four vacancies to fill on GIOPS. It will be wise to solicit the interest of members.

It was also decided to review the Government Information Sources weblinks and to feature them as a GIOPS initiative on the IFLA website. In addition all of the GIOPS sessions for the Jerusalem Conference were reviewed and the findings were used to prepare for the Boston 2001 Conference.

In Conclusion ....

Unfortunately the Conference ended all too soon and GIOPS members returned to their busy schedules, but everybody was glowing with a feeling of accomplishment for all they had achieved during the Conference. GIOPS members did have a few moments of respite to explore inside and outside of the walls of this beautiful and historic city .....

[Dining in ancient Roman style at the Cardo Culinaria](#), left to right, Elisabeth Sundholm, Bruno Gnassi & Johanne (Spouse), Jerry Mansfield, Felicity Caird.

[Some GIOPS members photographed](#) as they regretfully leave the Conference, left to right, Bruno Gnassi, Elisabeth Sundholm, Helen Sheehy (Chair) & Jim (Spouse), Jane Wu, Sandra da Conturbia.