



IFLADIAL Working Group Report on IFLA Communications to IFLA Professional Committee Meeting, December 2012

1 Purpose of paper

This paper looks at issues of communication with IFLA, as identified by members and activists, and suggests areas for improvement.

2 Background

The issue of communication within IFLA was highly discussed during the WLIC in Helsinki. During several business meetings with IFLA representatives, it became clear that many IFLA Officers and activists are not quite satisfied with the current practices; an active interest in strengthening the flow of information and communication was expressed.

As a result of one of these discussions during the Division IV Leadership Brief, led by Division Chair Anna Maria Tamaro on August 12, the IFLADIAL Working Group was established to investigate concerns related to IFLA communication issues and to develop proposals for the PC to consider at its meeting in December 2012. The Working Group met face to face on August 14 to develop a work strategy and establish a consultation mechanism.

3 Consultation

On August 28 the IFLADIAL group posted an **opening statement** (*Appendix 1*) in English and Spanish inviting participation to contribute to web-based discussions using different channels, including IFLA-L and comments on several IFLA blogs, all linked through the use of a shared hashtag (*#ifladiat*). The opening statement on **IFLA-L and blogposts** generated very few, but nevertheless very interesting responses.

A **short online survey** available in English in Spanish, was also set up and advertised. 25 replies (14 in English and 11 in Spanish) were received by September 16, with a good geographical spread, including Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, New Caledonia, Norway, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, USA and UK.

45% of the respondents to the online survey were IFLA Officers / SC Members / SIG Conveners. Although not all respondents addressed all the questions, the answers were quite similar, hence symptomatic of generalised concerns.

A further 20 people participated on the **#ifladiat tweetchats** which took place on September 1 and Saturday 8 September. The same five key questions on the online survey were posted on twitter to generate discussion:

Q1. *What do you think about the way that IFLA communicates with its activists?*

Q2. *What do you think about the way that IFLA communicates with its members?*

- Q3. *What do you think about the way that IFLA communicates with the general public?*
Q4. *What do you think about the way that IFLA uses social media? (blogs, twitter, etc)*
Q5. *What suggestions do you have to improve communications within IFLA?*

Storify was used to keep a record of the [1st tweetchat](#), [2nd tweetchat](#) and the [general ifladial archive including tweets and blog posts](#)

4 Consultation Outcomes

A majority of respondents would like to see more transparency in decision-making processes, and more open discussions rather than just decisions communicated to Officers and other activists.

Current communication between IFLA and its activists was described as *“very fragmented and in some cases dysfunctional”* whilst respondents wished it would be *“more bottom-up than top-down”*. Leaders should invite frank discussion: *“Communication is “naturally” personal, informal, peer-based. Hierarchical patterns of communication have to change in order to encourage more people to participate”*. In that regard, the President Elect session, the IFLA Communicator of the Year Award and the *“signs of willingness to listen to and to profile newcomers”* were cited as examples of current good practice.

There was also the general feeling that Officers are limited by rules: *“IFLA consists of many friendly persons hampered by a rather inflexible structure”*; *“the rules for SIGs - where new trends show up - look rather old-fashioned: they represent a traditional/formal way of conceptualising the organisation”*.

There seems to be some confusion regarding the Strategic Plan; it was felt that this currently has several layers and more clarity on how it is written and applied by IFLA Sections would help their own planning.

It was acknowledged that *“Some sections are moving ahead, while others are lagging far behind”* and that communication between Sections is minimal and should be encouraged.

There should also be more clear communication about personal membership benefits to members and non-members, especially students: *“personal membership benefits - like involvement with the organisation - seem to be quite vague and not too attractive”*. Respondents felt that much could be done to broaden engagement at all levels: *“IFLA is shaped by leaders/managers/big libraries. Also for economic reasons”* and that enhanced multilingual communication is key: *“newcomers to big organisations such as IFLA tend to keep a low profile because they do not know the cultural rules, and it takes time to get to know them”*.

Most communication between IFLA officers and activists is face to face at the WLICs – this was described as *“traditional, ‘industrial age’ (from the time of paper), with a bit of email tacked on”*. If members cannot come to the WLIC, there is almost no communication. For many in South East Asia and Latin America (national libraries, library associations etc), IFLA is something far away and expensive.

Most respondents would like ongoing, constant communication online. The need for an intensified exchange in these virtual spheres and *“a shift from static websites towards more participating media like social networks”* was expressed by young activists, who felt that mailing lists are *“rather old fashion”* and that the static website mixes archaic (mail system), administrative (formal news items), semi-modern (blog platform) and moderns (RSS). It was pointed out that although *“static websites are still needed for authentication of logos, agendas and addresses, RSS could upgrade the frontpage”*. Similar comments suggested that *“the*

frontpage of IFLA site should show hashtags and should change to reflect current happenings, and links to the archive (or 'frozen' website) could go” and “static websites are so 1996, social networks are the future, lets build an IFLA social network.”

Question 4, *What do you think about the way that IFLA uses social media? (blogs, twitter, etc)* generated the largest proportion of comments. According to respondents, only 30-40% of Sections have a blog, twitter or Facebook accounts; however, these are only useful if Sections can post interesting and involving information on a regular basis - a group blog like NPSIG's, where teamwork is key, was used as an example of a successful blog.

IFLA would benefit from a much stronger (deeper, broader) and more strategic social media strategy. So far (with some exceptions) new media have just been added on top of the old structure. Respondent missed personal blogging and twittering that allow readers to sense the breath and pulse of the organisation.

Most IFLA blogs *“have no traction; there are plants without water - and nobody seems to care”*. Infrequent posts without a personal touch do not engage readers and a rapid scan of the existing IFLA blogs: blogs.ifla.org/hq/ confirms that – at the time of the survey the last update on Headquarters IFLA blog dated back to 2010. IFLA's Professional Committee's own blog, ProfSpeak: blogs.ifla.org/profspeak was welcomed as a very good start although it should be more visible - at the moment the new blog, which uses a locally hosted WordPress platform, is not visible on IFLA's own [list of featured blogs](#) thus, new ProfSpeak posts are not visible under *Recent posts*.

Regarding IFLA led communications in twitter, respondents felt that there is not much personal communication and dialogue and that there is often little activity at all. The twitter [@IFLA](#) account seems to barely engage with their followers and rather link to resources only.

5 Changing in the Future

IFLA is the sum of its members. Respondents expressed a wish for IFLA to change for transparency and collective learning purposes, and in order to try new ways of engaging with the community. We need to really encourage members to communicate IFLA's aims to the public and decision makers and place more value on what active members do for IFLA; a single activist who spends 200 hours to support IFLA's mission contributes de facto several thousand euros with a human face to the organisation.

While library and information professionals are eager to demonstrate the contributions we are making to society through our work in learning and research, information literacy, health information provision, social engagement, etc., IFLA communicates from the inside out, perpetuating the public image of libraries: books, benevolent, boring. We need a communication strategy from the user's perspective (outside in) to showcase our contributions and bring the voice of librarians to the public discuss, especially in political issues such as copyright, open access, freedom of speech, etc. While some acknowledged that a good job has been done lately, the majority felt that IFLA remains largely invisible - most people outside the library field (and quite a few within the field) have absolutely no idea that IFLA exists.

6 Challenges

IFLA seems overstretched: too many well-intentioned goals are being pursued with too few human and financial resources. This is typical of humanistic NGOs: the decision making structure does not link the programs we vote for and the resources we allocate. While this goes far beyond communications, it contributes to the internal stress.

IFLA's communication does come across as bureaucratic and a bit peremptory (instructions, deadlines). We bear in mind, though, that IFLA is quite a large body with many parts, and rules and deadlines are needed to ensure that things get done in a coordinated way.

IFLA is made up of many people from many countries and different backgrounds; there are different communication needs at different levels, in different groups and for different purposes. While an update is definitely required and social media offers great opportunities, we should not forget that a significant proportion of IFLA members and potential members still encounter barriers due to lack of access to technological advances (no reliable internet connexion, antiquated equipment), as well as language and skill barriers.

Lack of resources brings a gap in participation as wide as the digital divide, which also needs bridging. Balancing IFLA participation between members from developed countries and professionals from countries still in development through greater communication and involvement, incorporating those from countries which currently still do not have much of a presence, and communicating with and strengthening national library associations are good starting points to achieve more balance.

7 How could we change for the better?

By being more tolerant; remembering that everybody is a volunteer. Hierarchy is at best a practical tool to get things done; at worst it defeats the very purpose of the organisation. The key is to practice real dialogue, deep listening and organisational learning.

IFLA could arrange the leadership forums not as "briefs" but a platforms with GB and PC members' presence for activists to ask and suggest, and put more effort into organising virtual meetings to encourage greater participation.

The website is very serious, rather boring, not the most user friendly and not fun to work with. Some feel that it is a pity that we have to bury our interesting and useful content in such a grave. The web masters are doing their best, but the current system does not allow to do better. Some investment on the website may be appropriate in order to develop a more user friendly website (especially the WLIC website), including check lists / FAQs for newcomers, an online newcomer's session, a blog to get the answers to common questions, and more story telling – let members tell their stories on the web, make visible what IFLA is really about: library people meeting each other, sharing experiences, getting inspiration from each other's way of working.

Since IFLA uses the WordPress platform, it is very easy to monitor web traffic, and to share this information by publishing traffic statistics for ProfSpeak (as the default option) and the other blogs hosted by IFLA. This will help everybody understand what our users are doing – or not doing – on the IFLA web site.

Library blogs exist in a competitive universe. Web readers expect blogs to be relatively informal, on the one hand, and frequently updated, on the other. Guidelines on the form and frequency of blogging (keep an informal tone; how often we can expect new items - daily, weekly, monthly) would be useful.

We would also encourage IFLA to do some benchmarking with respect to internal and external communications, looking systematically at guidelines and practices of a sample of similar organisations with well developed internal and external comms. and social media strategies.

8 Recommendation

The PC is invited to discuss the paper and note any improvements which can be made.

Appendix 1: IFLADIAL opening statement

On Saturday, August 11, at the very start of the IFLA World Library and Information Congress 2012 in Helsinki, all Section officers – including Special Interest Groups' Convenors – were invited to the Leadership Brief arranged by the [Professional Committee](#) (PC). There was great interest in this meeting – the room was full at 8AM.

The formal agenda had four information items; the final point was devoted to “questions and discussion”. Many of the participants clearly wanted a more participatory meeting, and said so during the debate. Debates and decisions ought to be more transparent to newcomers and the library world outside IFLA. People want much more dialogue and mutual learning, rather than a steady stream of guidelines, deadlines and reports. Ann Okerson, who heads the PC, was later [interviewed by IFLA Express](#) and expressed her strong interest in innovation.

At the Division IV Leadership Brief on Sunday, August 12, we had a lively discussion about communication within IFLA, ably led by Division Chair Anna Maria Tammaro. As a result, Division IV decided to set up a small Working Group, coordinated by NPSIG Convenor Sebastian Wilke, to address the communication issue and to develop proposals for the PC. The Working Group had its first meeting on Tuesday, August 14.

IFLA as an organisation is definitely moving towards greater openness, participation and web awareness. We recognise and appreciate this development. At the same time we – like many others – feel that IFLA needs to speed up the process.

IFLA is changing, but the world is changing faster. As an institution IFLA is still five to ten years behind the “best cases” of open, participatory, web oriented organisations.

The IFLA language is forward looking. It stresses inspiration, participation, empowerment and the need for change. But much of the organisational practice is rather bureaucratic. The real decision processes are not transparent, and there is very little open debate about contested issues.

We want IFLA to “walk the talk”. The best way to change this situation is to combine initiatives from the top – [Governing Board](#), [Professional Committee](#), [IFLA HQ](#) – with initiatives from below. This means:

- more dialogue, speaking together on a basis of equality;
- more transparency, so that we can understand and participate in IFLA decision making processes on an informal basis;
- personal visibility on the web, so that we can get to know people, their positions and their interests without going to lots of meetings.

In order to help us drafting a paper on communications, we would like to start a conversation on these issues on the open web, which we invite all friends of IFLA to join. Please let us have your suggestions and ideas on how to improve the current situation regarding communications within IFLA **by Saturday September 15**.

As members of the Working Group, we will be active in presenting our own views in open fora. We will also do our best to follow and collect contributions from you that we will incorporate to the paper on communications to be presented by Anna Maria Tammaro for discussion at the PC meeting in December 2012.

To make this process easier, we will use existing blogs, the IFLA mailing list and other online platforms; please use [#ifladiab](#) for any posts, tweets and other contributions.

We have also created a **short online survey** which we would be grateful if you could complete to give us your views. The survey, available in English at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/M8W7FZR> will close at the end of **Saturday September 15**.

Additionally, we will have **two #ifladiab chats on Twitter** on **Saturday September 1** and **Saturday September 8** to give you further possibilities to join the discussion. The twitter chats will last for one hour and the starting times are as follows:

1st of September:

Vancouver (Canada – British Columbia)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 02:00:00	PDT	UTC-7 hours
Chicago (U.S.A. – Illinois)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 04:00:00	CDT	UTC-5 hours
New York (U.S.A. – New York)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 05:00:00	EDT	UTC-4 hours
Buenos Aires (Argentina)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 06:00:00	ART	UTC-3 hours
London (United Kingdom – England)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 10:00:00	BST	UTC+1 hour
Berlin (Germany – Berlin)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 11:00:00	CEST	UTC+2 hours
Cape Town (South Africa)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 11:00:00	SAST	UTC+2 hours
Moscow (Russia)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 13:00:00	MSK	UTC+4 hours
Bangkok (Thailand)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 16:00:00	ICT	UTC+7 hours
Singapore (Singapore)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 17:00:00	SGT	UTC+8 hours
Tokyo (Japan)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 18:00:00	JST	UTC+9 hours
Sydney (Australia – New South Wales)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 19:00:00	EST	UTC+10 hours
Corresponding UTC (GMT)	Saturday, 1 September 2012, 09:00:00		

8th of September:

Vancouver (Canada – British Columbia)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 10:00:00	PDT	UTC-7 hours
Chicago (U.S.A. – Illinois)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 12:00:00	CDT	UTC-5 hours
New York (U.S.A. – New York)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 13:00:00	EDT	UTC-4 hours
Buenos Aires (Argentina)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 14:00:00	ART	UTC-3 hours
London (United Kingdom – England)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 18:00:00	BST	UTC+1 hour
Berlin (Germany – Berlin)	Saturday, 8 September 2012,	CEST	UTC+2 hours

	19:00:00	I	
Cape Town (South Africa)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 19:00:00	SAS I	UTC+2 hours
Moscow (Russia)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 21:00:00	MSK	UTC+4 hours
Bangkok (Thailand)	Sunday, 9 September 2012, 00:00:00	ICT	UTC+7 hours
Singapore (Singapore)	Sunday, 9 September 2012, 01:00:00	SGT	UTC+8 hours
Tokyo (Japan)	Sunday, 9 September 2012, 02:00:00	JST	UTC+9 hours
Sydney (Australia – New South Wales)	Sunday, 9 September 2012, 03:00:00	EST	UTC+10 hours
Corresponding UTC (GMT)	Saturday, 8 September 2012, 17:00:00		

In October we will make the draft paper available for comments and suggestions.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Thanks in advance for your contributions,

Sebastian Wilke, Convenor of the New Professionals Special Interest Group (NPSIG)

Maria Cotera, Convenor of the Women, Information and Libraries Special Interest Group (WILSIG)

Tord Høivik, Secretary of Statistics and Evaluation Section

Ulrike Lang, Co-Chair of the Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning Section (CPDWL)

Dace Udre, NPSIG activist

Sanita Maleja, NPSIG activist

Dierk Eichel, Information Coordinator of NPSIG

Catharina Isberg, Information Coordinator of the CPDWL Section

Silvia Cecilia Anselmi, Web Editor of the Latin America and the Caribbean Section (LAC)

The IFLADIAL opening statement was posted on the IFLA mailing list (in English and Spanish) and the [IFLA website](#) as well as on several blogs including the [GLOSSA blog](#), the [CPDWL blog](#), the [NPSIG blog](#), and the [LAC blog](#) (in Spanish)