

It's Fun to Interview Him, If You Can Catch Him: an interview with Robert Wedgeworth

Robert Wedgeworth, President of IFLA from 1991 to 1997, talks to Laverne Carroll about his time in office and his views on international librarianship.

Frances Laverne Carroll

Robert Wedgeworth, President of the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) from 1991–1997, was interviewed by Laverne Carroll on August 20, 1998, at the Hotel Okura, Amsterdam, during the 64th General Conference of IFLA. Laverne began:

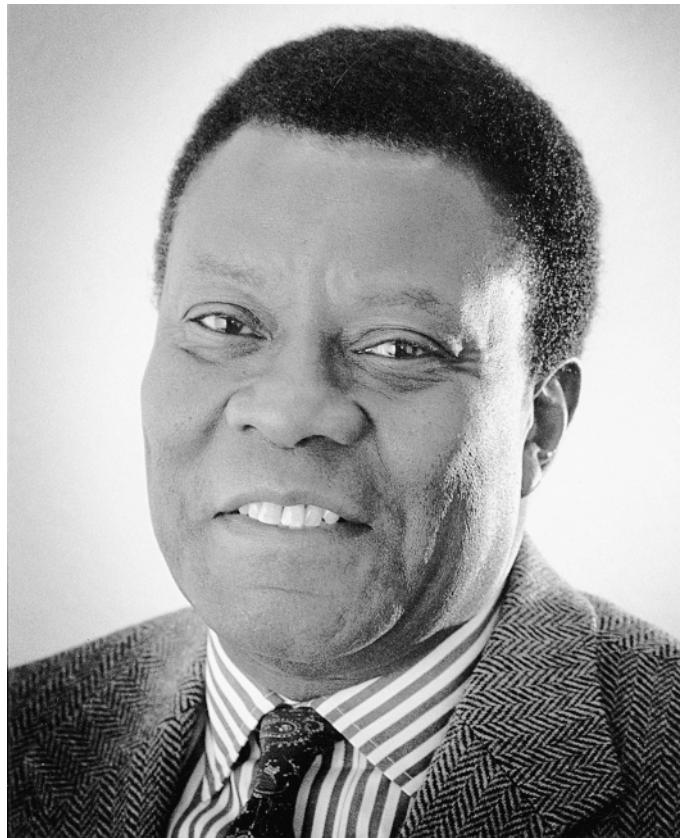


Figure 1. Robert Wedgeworth (by I. Szabo).

Q: As we both realize, it has taken a year for us to arrange a convenient time for this interview. I personally hesitated, as an American interviewing an American; then I realized that I should continue the series of presidential interviews

for IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), and you did not hesitate in your agreement to be interviewed as we renegotiated dates and times for it to happen. People who read about successful people always want to know more about the life of the person. What is your earliest memory of books and libraries?

A: I grew up in a city which had a public library system that was part of the school district, in Kansas City, Missouri, USA. The children's librarian in my local branch library would come to my elementary school about once every two months, and often it was close to a holiday like Thanksgiving or Easter; sometimes she would just have a theme for the season of the year. She would come and give a book talk; and then she would deliver books to each of the classrooms to encourage the students to read, outside of their classroom work, and then invite them to have a library card and use their local library branch near where they lived. She had a very lively personality and was an author of children's books also. She wrote stories about the opening of the West in the USA. That was my earliest memory of a librarian in my life, and she stimulated me to read although I already had good motivation from my school. What she did was she opened up the big collection of the public library to me; that was very different from the school books that I had and the few books that I might acquire because there was not a book store close to where I lived. That was my earliest memory of being stimulated to read widely and very quickly discovering how much you could expand your experience by reading.

Q: How much do you want to say about your personal life?

A: My personal life has been a rather public life from the time I went to the American Library Association (ALA) in Chicago in the early 1970s. While there are things that people may not know about my background, I think that my life has been fairly well explored; but I feel comfortable talking about my personal life.

Q: I was surprised you were born in Texas; and today, you look younger than you are. I believe you have one daughter whom I saw in Oslo. Is that correct?

A: Yes, that was her earliest IFLA (1975). She was eight months old. My wife and I had decided that we would have as little as possible change in our plans with a baby. We fitted her in with the things that we wanted to do, and that was the first major trip. We had packed very carefully, but I do remember that most of our luggage consisted of baby diapers. We went to England for a week, then to western Norway and travelled overland to Oslo – in one of the hottest summers on record. Cicely was miserable; it was such a relief when we arrived in Oslo because I had made arrangements to stay in an air-conditioned hotel. She went to the opening ceremony of IFLA, and I was carrying her on my back in an infant carrier.

Q: I remember that summer and Cicely; but now, how international are you? When did you feel you were international?

A: When you grow up in the Midwest (USA), it is not normal for you to think internationally. However, a surprising number of people who seek international careers come from the Midwest because you become interested in faraway places and places that are different from where you grow up. I have had an interest in international activities going back to the time when I was very young although I did not begin to think about it as a career until I went away to college. When I went back to my 20th college reunion, I was surprised to be confronted with the freshman essay that I had written the first week of college. In that essay I said I wanted to work for the State Department as a foreign relations officer. I had completely forgotten about it. Obviously, I did not go to the State Department, but I found other ways to carry out my interests in international activities.

Q: How soon were you involved in international library activities?

A: My involvement with IFLA began almost as soon as I became Executive Director of ALA, but IFLA was not the first of my professional activities internationally. From the very beginning of my career as a professional librarian I very quickly began to specialize in foreign acquisitions. My earliest international contacts were not with librarians but with foreign booksellers. I was one of the first recipients of a Council on Library Resources [USA] fellowship. My fellowship was a study of the Western European book trade, focusing on blanket and approval orders at the time they were first being introduced on a large scale to North American libraries. I brought that experience from being involved in the international book world with me to the ALA.

I started at the American Library Association in August, 1972. The IFLA general conference that year was in Budapest; but since I had only been on the job for two weeks, I asked my predecessor if he would represent ALA at the Budapest conference. I went to my first IFLA conference the following year in Grenoble.

Q: Was there continuity in your attending IFLA meetings after that?

A: Yes, but my initial relationship with IFLA was not as an active participant in the IFLA professional programs. I saw my role in IFLA during my tenure as Executive Director of the ALA as the person who was responsible for advancing the interests of my members in IFLA. I organized some of the first efforts to recruit and encourage our members to become involved in IFLA in various areas of specialization to enable representation of Americans in all the areas that were of interest to the ALA membership. I also worked to create a coordinating mechanism in order for the seven member-library organizations in the USA to work together in terms of IFLA membership.

Q: IFLA describes itself as independent, non-profit, international, and nongovernmental. It has members from 141

countries. Was there any motivation on your part to enter the IFLA world and become the president of IFLA?

A: I was not terribly motivated to become an officer of IFLA in the early stages. As I said, my principal concern was to see my members advance within IFLA and to put up our members as candidates for offices. During my tenure at ALA, we did propose an American candidate for the IFLA presidency. I did not begin to think about IFLA service until I had decided that I was going to leave the ALA.

Q: My next question is about time frames. For one, it has been over sixty years for another American to become president of IFLA. William W. Bishop, University of Michigan, was the second president of IFLA, 1931–1936, and the first American to hold that office. I am asking you, the second American, from your viewpoint, was it a long or short six years to hold the office of IFLA president?

A: Six years is a long time to serve as the president of any organization although that period of time is not unusual for international organizations. It takes a couple of years for you to become acquainted with what needs to be done and for you to obtain a certain amount of visibility among the members.

Q: The years between Bishop and Wedgeworth increased the honour you received on being elected to the office. How did you accomplish this feat?

A: My experience at ALA was very helpful. There are two things that are required to be elected. One is that you have to obtain a certain amount of visibility and the other is that you have to develop a reputation for being effective. The USA has too much influence and too many votes in IFLA to be denied if they really want it. One reason was that we have never been terribly motivated to seek higher offices in IFLA. Also, there was not systematic preparation for leadership in IFLA. What we did in promoting our members was that we had capable members in all the sections of IFLA who could advise their colleagues about Americans who might be candidates for the Executive Board or for president. Prior to that we had only a few Americans who were active in a few sections, and we were not widely spread throughout the federation. It is not so difficult, but you do have to work at it with some order.

Q: Was being black any advantage?

A: It is a fact; people knew me. It allowed me to stand out in the crowd of IFLA, in the crowd of Americans, although I was not the only Afro-American delegate from the USA going regularly to IFLA. The only non-European elected to the Executive Board of IFLA was P.B. Mangla from India; he was elected to the Executive Board at the same time I was.

Q: Which IFLA meeting was most outstanding for you, granted the answer could easily be the recent one in Russia (1991)? You at the time said your first minutes in office were almost

coinciding with the break-up of a huge country and a major political organization. It was, however, the speech you gave at the closing session of IFLA in Moscow that convinced me that this man I am now interviewing had talent, sensitivity, and the potential to do good work in the world.

A: IFLA meetings are different and several stand out in my mind for different reasons. The only IFLA meeting that I have missed since 1973 was the 1979 conference in Copenhagen. I was given a study tour in Australia that year. The IFLA meeting in Strbské Pleso in 1978 stands out because of the unusual circumstances. They switched the venue at the last minute away from Prague to the mountains because they realized it was going to be the 10th anniversary of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Our being miserably cold in the mountains was offset, for me, by my acquaintance for the first time with the delegate from Cuba which has developed into a very warm relationship over the years. The 1982 meeting in Montreal stands out in my mind because I think the Canadians were the first organizers of a modern IFLA conference, to put together a big exhibition that was more the North American style. The Washington, DC conference (1974) had a small exhibition for IFLA, but the Canadians organized a much larger one which made me think about what the prospects for IFLA could be in having larger exhibits. The 1981 meeting in East Germany (Leipzig) was instructive because it gave us a glimpse of socialist society which we had not seen in Prague. Although I had been to Moscow, I always consider it to be somewhat different. Also at the 1981 meeting I had the opportunity to meet the legendary Margarita Ivanovna Rudomino, who was the founder of the All-Union State Library of Foreign Literature in Moscow and remained its director for fifty years. It is now the M. I. Rudomino State Library for Foreign Literature. The meeting of which I was most fond was the Chicago meeting because we organized it (1985).

Q: The unusual timing of an IFLA meeting in November gave the Americans a chance to serve a traditional Thanksgiving dinner in the Library of Congress. Tell us how you decided on the successful highlight of the Chicago conference which we all remember.

A: We were trying to do something that would be different for IFLA but that would make the Chicago conference memorable. We knew as residents of Chicago that most people do not see the real Chicago. The way the city is structured on the lake front, you come in through the back door. The front door is really the lake, and we wanted to have the delegates experience what the lake is like in summer. We wanted something that was special. Chicago is a city of neighbourhoods, and the block party is a very traditional summer activity in Chicago. At the ALA headquarters we work very hard at being a good neighbour; with three nearby churches there are activities in that neighbourhood all summer long. We wanted the IFLA participants to be able to share that experience of a Chicago Block Party, and it was enormously successful.

The conference was not enormously successfully finan-

cially because we barely broke even. We were in the middle of a recession in the USA, and it was hard to develop plans when our constituents were really suffering economically. The conference was very successful programmatically. Again, it did give me a sense of what the real potential was for IFLA general conferences. It was the conference where I was elected to the Executive Board of IFLA; it was the conference where we introduced the idea of Spanish as an official language of IFLA.

Q: At the beginning of your presidency of IFLA, the organization was growing noticeably. How do you view that period?

A: IFLA was growing steadily, but we were not necessarily doing things systematically to stimulate that growth. It was just naturally happening because of the growing awareness of the field of librarianship. I started my presidency in a crisis. If you will recall, beginning in 1989 with the turbulence in Germany, that two year period, 1989–1991, changed the whole political, social, and economic structure of Central and Eastern Europe. While the change in Russia in 1991, during the week of the IFLA conference, was largely symbolic, it brought to a head changes in all of those countries. When I became president, we were facing a crisis in IFLA. We were about to lose our entire Central and Eastern European membership which would have had a substantial financial impact and certainly a programmatic impact on IFLA. At the same time IFLA's success had been largely supplemented financially by the Council on Library Resources and by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). UNESCO had announced they were going to move away from the block grants of funds that they had been giving to the non-governmental organizations to a series of grants related to programs. There was great uncertainty as to how we would be able to survive without both the UNESCO block grant and a substantial amount of revenue from our Central and Eastern European members.

Q: You had a crisis, and you went to work?

A: Yes, the treasurer of IFLA and I went to work immediately. We formed an IFLA working group on finance to prepare a financial strategy for IFLA. It was during that period that we were interviewing for a new Secretary General of IFLA, and we wanted someone who could substantially energize IFLA to deal efficiently with those problems.

Q: The aims of IFLA are:

Understanding and discussion
Cooperation and development
Research – and education (which you have just added)
in all fields of library activity.

The structure is:

Executive Board (10)
Professional Board (12)
Core Programs (5)
Divisions (8), Sections (34), Round Tables (11).

When you look at the aims and the structure, are there

certain parts of the structure from which you feel support will come readily to meet the aims and objectives?

- A: I guess I do not look at associations in quite that way. I think that successful associations are those which have a structure that facilitates the work of the members and stays out of their way. The members know very well what they would like to do, but too often the bureaucracy and the rules get in the way. The building blocks that I consider important to me and that were helpful to me as IFLA president were my experience at the ALA and my experience in my editing three editions of an encyclopaedia which gave me a very broad knowledge of the different parts of our library world. I brought that; and, what I felt IFLA needed was to concentrate on some fundamentals that would facilitate the members' work. The membership should not have to worry about how they recruit members. If they do good work in the divisions and sections, then the organization ought to be able to recruit members naturally to the success of its professional programs. There had not been a pattern for doing that.

I also recognized from my knowledge of ALA history that the growth of our association was largely built around the once-a-year opportunity for our members to see the major products and services that were available to them. The books, equipment, and furniture that colleagues in major metropolitan communities could see routinely were not known to others. I recognized what our Canadian colleagues had done in 1982, and we began to build the basis for exhibits which our colleagues in Barcelona (1993) exploited so well that it was for the first time seen how mounting a major exhibit became a substantial contributor to the professional program of IFLA. What they did specifically was that they made a very strong effort, and they went out and talked to a lot of exhibitors that people had never talked to before and persuaded them to exhibit at that IFLA conference.

There was not a problem with the IFLA professional program; it was that IFLA was operating at too low a level to benefit the professional program, to make it attractive. IFLA had a good product; its divisions and sections were producing good programs but not enough people knew about them and how they could be important to them.

- Q: Let's go back to research. Has any research been done on IFLA?

- A: We give scholarships to people who do research on various aspects of the IFLA program. Under the leadership of the current Secretary General, we have done a lot of research on our membership, to look at our membership in different ways that would help us to understand how to support and encourage membership. There are small research projects going on, but they are focused mostly on internal IFLA issues rather than on external issues.

- Q: How did you manage the Executive Board in order to get broad decisions which affected countries?

- A: I am not sure we thought about it. We felt we had a mandate from the members to lead IFLA. When I became IFLA

President, I had the broadest membership on the Executive Board that IFLA had ever had in terms of representatives from different parts of the world. We also felt we had to deal directly with the financial crisis. We did things like establishing a sponsors program which was an idea that had been presented some years ago by an American member of the Executive Board. It took the energy of the new Secretary General to take the recommendations of the Executive Board and recruit those sponsors. We looked at how we were going to deal with the loss of members in Central and Eastern Europe. We were available to talk with their governments and to persuade their governments to support their continued participation in IFLA. We found ways for them to come back as institutional members. With our strong efforts to recruit institutional members we largely replaced the library association income that we had lost during that period. We had formal membership campaigns for the first time in IFLA!

- Q: The officers of IFLA, the first and second vice-presidents, and the treasurer, are elected by and from the Executive Board. The president and the Executive Board are elected by the membership. How did you manage the Executive Board within itself?

- A: We did that by giving everybody a job. My experience on the Executive Board previous to being president led me to believe that we were not using the experience and talents as well as we could. We for the first time organized board committees that focused on specific sectors. We gave every board member a responsibility, such as advising conference organizers, the visibility and attraction of IFLA, design of recruitment information, resolving barriers to membership. We became a working board in ways that we had not used before, and I think with it that gave us the opportunity to utilize the variety of experiences that the board members brought. Another collaboration was the round table for library associations which gave us a much more precise understanding of the problems and opportunities of the constituent national associations of IFLA.

- Q: Are there still any significant, limiting factors that IFLA is facing?

- A: Oh, yes, there are some factors that will always be there. One of the most challenging is how to address the problem of language. You can only have so many official languages. Even with five official languages there are many areas of the program where members are in essence prohibited from participating because they cannot communicate in their own language. That is an ongoing problem of an international organization.

- Q: Is the solution the bringing of translators with a delegation?

- A: It is not sufficient. IFLA is so much larger, and the people are scattered out into many sections and divisions. We would like to have more participation of delegates in certain meetings; but, if simultaneous or consecutive inter-

pretation is not available, they are not comfortable enough to participate. I had worked very closely with the IFLA group of interpreters, and the first crisis we had with interpretation was when the Australians pointed out that they could not afford to bring the group of IFLA interpreters, that we had worked very hard to form, from Europe to Australia and that they would have to use local interpreters. I was instrumental as a member of the IFLA Executive Board in helping IFLA to obtain a three-year grant from the H. W. Wilson Company [USA] sufficient to finance the participation of professional IFLA interpreters in the conference (Sydney, 1988). The understanding was that IFLA was going to work on a way to continue that. Unfortunately, IFLA just took the money and spent it on the interpreters. When we were at the end of the period, we were in the same position as we were at the beginning.

Q: Is there an outstanding type of activity that is significant and reliable for IFLA in the future?

A: The most dramatic development of IFLA was the change in 1994 when we announced that we were going to grow as an electronic organization, and the introduction of IFLANET has been the most important tool for communication that IFLA has ever had. For a nongovernmental organization communication is the most important thing that we do. Whatever you do that can create more effective ways for members to communicate with each other and to communicate with the organization, that is one to build. As you can see, while IFLA was growing steadily for a long period of time, the growth accelerated from the point at which we introduced IFLANET. All of a sudden members across all time zones could be in touch with each other and with the organization twenty-four hours a day. To me, that is the most dramatic change.

Q: Does IFLA do anything to communicate with new nations when they appear on the United Nations list of member states?

A: Here, you have to distinguish between governmental and nongovernmental organizations. The fact that a nation is new does not have any significance for IFLA as such; rather, does it have any library structure that can relate to IFLA. Our focus is not on nationhood but on the profession and the institutions of librarianship because that is really the formal purpose of IFLA.

Q: Do you, therefore, look at a new nation to determine the library structure and the characteristics of the nation?

A: We look at all countries continually; we have a continuing effort through our membership committee to try to identify those factors that either encourage or inhibit institutions and organizations to become members of IFLA. The problems are very different from those of a governmental organization because you have to have a responsive library community or library or professional organization to take advantage of IFLA membership. We have, for example,

countries that routinely are willing to sponsor other countries, but we also have the puzzling situation that many countries which default on their dues and lose their IFLA membership do not have a structure to respond to opportunities to be sponsored. There are many issues that are related to maintaining and expanding an IFLA membership. Much of the IFLA membership in the recent past has been institutional, primarily because many countries lack an effective library association to advance their membership. These are issues that are constantly looked at over and over as a result of our having a membership committee.

Q: When you and the Secretary General of IFLA were travelling, I assume that was for the purpose of locating places for future meetings of IFLA?

A: It was almost entirely that although some of it was to look at other kinds of issues. For example, the trips we made to Latin America were for observation of the IFLA Regional Office [in Brazil] and the prospects for assisting in the development of library associations in that region.

Most of the travel in which we were engaged was because IFLA needed to extend its conference schedule beyond what it had before. Our effort was directed toward a ten-year schedule of designated sites that we could work against. We were successful in doing that although it took quite a lot of travel to develop that schedule. We have put in place a new process for selecting IFLA sites, and the first outcome from that process will be announced at this conference for 2003 [Berlin].

Q: When you were travelling, did you see 'pockets' of successful library development which you found to be unique or quite wonderful? Is there any record of such discoveries that could be published?

A: We do not normally take ownership of things that we observe. What we do is to try to draw those individuals or organizations into IFLA. Frequently, our travels would result in contacts that brought new participants into IFLA to report on activities in which they were engaged that were not common knowledge. It brought new exhibitors to IFLA who became aware of IFLA as a potential way to market whatever they were doing.

Q: How do you get the ideas up and out of the countries?

A: Some of that is done in referrals to the sections and divisions; some is encouraging individuals, offering them the opportunity to write a paper or to write for the *IFLA Journal* or to attend a conference. Some of it involved encouraging conference organizers to create ways to invite participants who cannot afford to come otherwise and then actively helping them to identify people who were doing interesting things in parts of the world that are not readily visible to a number of other IFLA members. Those are the unanticipated consequences of IFLA travel.

Q: In retrospect what would you wish you had done as president? There has been some criticism of IFLA.

A: I think I was surprisingly able to address all of the major areas of IFLA that were of concern to me during my presidency. The one area in which I feel I would have liked to have been more successful is in the work of creating a more robust grant-seeking effort on the part of IFLA to enable it to do some things outside of its membership structure to advance the interests of members. We have some real problems in the countries of Africa and also in Central America and South America which are not amenable to the normal mechanisms of IFLA. They require some other kinds of efforts that are outside the financial capabilities of IFLA. I do regret that I was not able to spend more time then, but that is one of the things on which I am working now, advising some major foundations of the opportunities to be effective in the sub-Saharan African region by helping those library communities and their institutions to develop which could be instrumental in stabilising their democracies.

As far as the criticism of IFLA meetings lacking substance, I think they have a great deal of substance; and the conferences are larger now. There is always tension between specialists and generalists in this kind of organization. The specialists do not ever want to address anything that is general, and the generalists become bored with the narrow focus of the specialist. You have to look constantly at the balance in order to determine that there is enough general content which unites the membership, yet the general content does not impede the advancement of the specialist.

Q: Two groups were formed recently in IFLA, CLM and FAIFE. Are they doing well?

A: The Committee on Copyright and Other Legal Matters (CLM) and Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) are off to a good start, but it is still very early. That was one of my major criticisms of IFLA. I felt that IFLA was too heavily involved in methods and techniques and was not involved heavily enough in the intellectual aspects of librarianship. I felt that those two areas, CLM and FAIFE, were important intellectual perspectives on librarianship that were not well enough represented in our membership.

Q: To pinpoint a geographical area for development, has South America, with its long history and moderate success in sending delegates to IFLA, been considered as a prospective area for an IFLA meeting?

A: Remember, IFLA does not propose meetings; IFLA receives invitations. There was a great deal of encouragement. The difficulty is that the library associations are not as strong in those countries as they should be, given the number of libraries and the number of librarians that they have. There is going to have to be some kind of major developmental effort, which needs to be organized, to address the problem. There is substantial financial capability in Central America and South America that can be brought to bear on these kinds of problems. We have seen things change in the individual countries; but they are not repre-

sented in IFLA as well as they ought to be, and the activities are not as prominent in their respective countries as they ought to be because they lack professional organization. One of the most encouraging signs of professional development in Latin America has been the creation of ABINIA (*La Asociación de Bibliotecas Nacionales de Iberoamérica*) which is the Association of the Directors of National Libraries. Chile and Venezuela have been prominent in the leadership of forming this group. It is a very encouraging sign. The national libraries are really the strongest institutions in the library community of that area.

Q: At the 50th anniversary of the founding of IFLA Herman Liebaers was and still is Mr. International Librarian. Do you fit that title?

A: I do not think so. The reason I would say that is that the arena has grown; there are many more effective people today than there would have been two decades ago within IFLA. I benefited greatly from the tutelage of a number of people who were very early in encouraging me to take an active part in the leadership of the American delegation in IFLA. Herman Liebaers was really my tutor in getting me acquainted with the issues and complexities of international librarianship. I learned enormously from listening to him and watching him. On the other hand there were many other individuals who were a part of the network with whom I worked in my IFLA career from the time I was on the Executive Board until the time I became president. I would say that in the future there will be many more role models that people can observe in terms of developing themselves for international careers in librarianship.

Q: What is next for Wedgeworth, IFLA, the profession?

A: Personally, I think I will continue to be involved with international activities, probably working more with specific projects than working as an officer of an organization, looking at specific problems where my experience and knowledge in the field can be helpful.

I do think that IFLA has to resolve its relationship with FID (International Federation for Information and Documentation). It is not a problem for IFLA, but we need a stronger presence in that area of our field. FID is at present in an unfortunately weak position, but they have not been willing to sit down and work with IFLA toward some desirable resolution. The result is a loss for members of FID and a loss for IFLA as well. We have to find a way to address that.

Q: At some time in the past this was discussed as a trio, that is, ICA (International Council on Archives) would be involved?

A: IFLA has developed a very good working relation with ICA that has benefited both organizations. I think that model is one that I would like to see extended to FID. The difficulty with partnerships is that it is difficult to partner with organizations that are so different in their capabilities. What has happened is that IFLA has grown enor-

mously in a relatively short period of time; and FID has, in fact, lost influence, lost membership, and lost operating capability in the same period. It is very difficult to partner such different entities. ICA has a different structure; they have national members and a schedule of meeting every four years. Personally, I intend to remain active in IFLA, trying to use my background experience and knowledge in specific ways.

Q: Is IFLA too dependent on UNESCO?

A: We are no longer dependent on UNESCO at all. What has happened is that UNESCO, despite its threats, did not cut IFLA off from its grants. The IFLA program grants are about the same size as the old block grants. UNESCO still makes a substantial contribution to IFLA that supplements the IFLA program, but we raise about the same amount of money from our sponsorship programs as we do from UNESCO.

Q: UNESCO does receive from us as well?

A: We recommend our experts to carry out projects that are of mutual interest. That is one of the major contributions that nongovernmental organizations make to programs like those of UNESCO.

Q: What is next for IFLA?

A: IFLA now has to create a more productive way of relating to the regions. We cannot do everything from IFLA headquarters in the Hague, representing the divisions and sections. Our regional offices and regional programs have never been funded at a level that would allow them to be as effective as they could be. It really has to be recognized by IFLA. I am not saying that necessarily means a bigger office since the changes in communications has given IFLA an alternative means. We have to find a more effective way to deliver the IFLA program to the regions. It does not show up so clearly in those regions with a number of active participants, but it shows up where there are not very many active participants.

Q: Is this a matter of nurturing, consultancies, for example?

A: Yes, it has to be a whole range of different kinds of programs and opportunities that will assist the regions and the individual countries in the region to develop their capabilities.

Q: For the whole profession how is the librarian known internationally?

A: First of all, there is not a common understanding of what a librarian is. We assume that there is; but if you look at our colleagues around the world, they come from very many different kinds of backgrounds. I have said, on other occasions, that people associate the strength of the North American library community with the fact that our institutions are generously funded in comparison to other parts of the world. Also, we have not had any major conflict on

our continent since the Civil War and a long period of uninterrupted development. The real reason is that since the 1920s we have had a shared understanding of what a librarian is, and the basis for that has been the education for the profession. Without that kind of general understanding of what kind of preparation a person needs for a job in our field, it is going to be very difficult to create that kind of sharp image of what the librarian is. There are too many variations in the kind of education that the librarian receives, and there are too many parts of the world where preparation for the work simply is not available. I regret I was not able to find a way to address that issue – the lack of a core educational program that ought to exist in any formal program for library work in the world. Until we can normalize the education for librarianship, it is difficult to direct attention to the issue of the image.

I think there is a lot more understanding and respect for democracy in the world today, and I think that it gives libraries and librarians an opportunity to do more because people recognize the need to have democratic institutions that undergird democratic societies. Americans tend to believe that other societies can be structured exactly the way our society is structured. They do not want to recognize some of the differences, the extreme differences that exist. We did try to account for that in IFLA when we started with the temporary committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression. We know the First Amendment to the Constitution of the USA does not exist for the most part outside the USA. Many Americans assume that it does. Article 19 of the United Nations Charter is well-known, and most of the countries of the world are signatories to Article 19; but there is a wide gap between being a signatory of a statement like that and putting it into practice. The work of George Soros in Central and Eastern Europe has been extremely important, and I think we have been benefited from his strong support and understanding of the importance of libraries to a democratic society.

We librarians need to recognize where we are, as distinct from where we want to be, and to move deliberately to try to adjust those kinds of issues where the demographics and cultures modify what we can do in areas like the education of all people in the world. I have a great deal of confidence in the potential of IFLA and the profession to continue to grow and adapt and be effective.

Abstract

Robert Wedgeworth, President of the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) from 1991–1997, was interviewed August 20, 1998, Hotel Okura, Amsterdam, during the 64th General Conference of IFLA. Past presidents of IFLA, starting with Sir Frank Francis, have been taped and transcriptions have been published. The persons being interviewed do not know the questions to be asked before the interview, but each does receive a photocopy of the proposed context before publication. Wedgeworth was previously interviewed by the author in 1986 on the subject

of international relations and the American Library Association (ALA) of which he was Executive Director at that time. The author has been privileged to know the five previous presidents personally before they were interviewed, including Wedgeworth since 1974, and IFLA since 1968. The interview incorporates some memories of IFLA meetings but largely presents the crisis during his presidency and the new

management techniques utilized within the IFLA structure to resolve problems and improve IFLA.

Frances Laverne Carroll is Professor Emeritus, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Oklahoma, 401 West Brooks Street, Room 120, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-0528, USA. Tel. +1 (405) 325-3921. Fax: +1 (405) 325-7648.

MORE ON AND BY ROBERT WEDGEWORTH

An interview with Robert Wedgeworth: international librarianship in the 1990s.

R. Chepesiuk, R. Wedgeworth. *International Leads*, 11 (3) Sep 1997, p.1–3. il.

Reports an interview with Robert Wedgeworth, outgoing president of IFLA, regarding his presidency and the issues affecting the international library community.

A global perspective on the library and information agenda.

R. Wedgeworth. *American Libraries*, 29 (6) Jun/Jul 1998, p.60–63, 65. il.

Part of an issue devoted largely to providing a global perspective on library developments. Discusses a variety of aspects of international librarianship and issues affecting its development. Notes the role of library schools in fostering library education across national boundaries and in promoting international relations; the effects of demographics and culture on this field and the roles of governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting international librarianship. Highlights a number of IFLA conferences since Manila 1980 which have been milestones in developing a more global perspective and agenda for librarianship, including Moscow in 1991, Havana in 1994 and Istanbul in 1995.

A view toward library users. [Una mirada hacia los usuarios de las bibliotecas.]

R. Wedgeworth. *Boletin de la Asociacion Andaluza de Bibliotecarios*, 13 (48) Sep 97, p.41–7.

Spanish translation of the presidential address at the opening session of the 62nd IFLA General Congress held in Peking, first published in IFLA Journal 22 (4) 1996 p.277–9. Notes the preoccupation, not only of the library community but society as a whole, with the changes taking place in the information environment and the rate at which this change has been taking place in the 1990s. Explores the new questions and dilemmas which the Information Age has thrust upon the library community and the direct link between timely access to accurate and reliable information and a nation's positive economic development. (The author may be contacted by electronic mail at rwedge@uiuc.edu).

Reaffirming professional values.

R. Wedgeworth. *IFLA Journal*, 23 (5/6) 1997, p.348–50. il.

Reviews activities undertaken by IFLA since 1992: the IFLA sponsors programme; strengthening of the exhibition programme within IFLA Conferences; the development of IFLANET; and membership development. Surveys challenges to be faced by IFLA in the coming decade: ensuring a balance between the technical development of libraries and the professional development of librarians with the importance of remaining focused on the needs of library users; legal barriers and political pressures; copyright and intellectual property laws; the necessity to ensure reasonable access to protected works for purposes of education and research; the growing gap between privileged users of the Internet and those who cannot access it.

What does it take to manage ALA?

R. Wedgeworth. *American Libraries*, 28 (11) Nov 1997, p.35–6.

A former ALA Executive Director (ED) explains why the position is important and why the person appointed should have a background as a librarian or information professional. Outlines the 3 areas of management that an ALA ED must master; notes ALA policies and traditions that account for many controversies over professional issues and that any successful director must be familiar with; addresses questions of ALA governance; and explains the importance of building a good relationship each year with the new ALA President. Concludes that the challenges of the position are great, but the satisfaction and rewards of having done well in the post can be even greater.