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INTERNATIONAL SCI-TECH LIBRARIANSHIP:
A REPORT OF THE ACTIVITIES OF IFLA'S SECTION
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY LIBRARIES
By Nancy D. Anderson

For several years now I have been reporting on the activities of the Section of Science and Technology Libraries of IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions). Fellow SLA Members Jimmy Dickerson and Patricia Yocum have joined me on the Standing Committee for the Section. I hope this latest article will continue to hold your interest. It's a pleasure to know that American sci-tech librarians are interested in learning more about developments around the world. In some cases, librarians have begun their own participation in these international conferences after reading articles in Sci-Tech News or The Specialist.

This year IFLA met in Barcelona, the capitol of Catalonia. Conference delegates soon learned to read signs in Spanish and Catalan. Since Barcelona had undergone extensive redevelopment in preparation for its hosting the Summer Olympic games the previous year, most delegates were looking forward to a conference in which politics or geography would not intrude on the content of the meeting. Remember we had gone through the coup in Moscow in 1991 and the heat of New Delhi in 1992! However, pickpockets proved to be a real nuisance, and a Midwestern-style thunderstorm caused the cancellation of the Science and Technology Libraries general program.

The general program on Sci-Tech Information for Non-Scientists was scheduled to begin on Tuesday afternoon after the mid-day siesta. As we waited for the meeting to begin, we noticed the sky becoming darker, eventually becoming a greenish-black. The rain came down in sheets, obliterating the buildings across the street. If I had been home in Illinois I would have headed for the tornado shelter! Within minutes, the lights in the Congress Palace went out. After waiting for two hours for the conference to resume, we decided to re-schedule the general program to precede our workshop on Thursday. We later learned in the newspapers, explaining "sci-tech information to non-scientists," that a lightning bolt had made a direct hit on the main transformer for Barcelona and much of Catalonia. How ironic that it was a fact of science and a failure of technology which ended our program for that day.

On Thursday the combined program/workshop went off with only some minor glitches. Many more people attended than would have ordinarily
registered for a workshop. Of these, many Spanish- and French-speaking librarians were in attendance and we did not have simultaneous interpretation facilities for the workshop. So our speakers spoke much more slowly and handed out the text of their remarks in advance. It was truly heartening to see colleagues doing impromptu translations (with a lot of hand gestures!) from English to French or French to English. What we may have lost in comprehension was gained in good will as we all learned how to deal with challenges of the different languages.

At the general program part of the session, Francis Agostini of the Mediatheque, Cite des Sciences et de l’Industrie (Paris) spoke on “Une Bibliotheconomie pour la vulgarisation scientifique” (in English, “A Library Policy for the Popularization of Science.”) Suzanne Ward of Purdue University Libraries spoke on Purdue University’s Technical Information Service: Providing Information to Businesses. Of the two papers, Sue’s talk evoked the most interest and comment as many European university librarians are only now beginning to consider providing information services to the business community.

These talks were followed by the Section’s half day workshop, which looked at the issue of “Charging for Science and Technology Information: Does It Help or Hinder Access?” This workshop was organized by Marty Kesselman (Head of Reference and Instructional Services at Rutgers University Library of Science and Medicine) and co-moderated by Julia Gelfand (University of California at Irvine) and him. There were several presentations advocating fee-based services: Sinikka Koskiala (Helsinki University of Technology Library, Helsinki, Finland), Sjoard Koopman (RAPDOC/PICA, Leiden, Netherlands), and Manuella Vasquez (CINDOC, Barcelona, Spain).

The other side of the story was given by Andrey Zemskov and Elena Eronina (State Public Library of Science and Technology, Moscow, Russia) who spoke about how Russia is moving away from a “services-for-free” socialism to a fee-based democracy and Subhish Aranachalam (Central Electrochemical Research Institute, Karaikudi, India) who spoke on the effects fee-based services have in developing countries. Julia Gelfand wrapped up the presentations, focusing on the collection development aspects of fee-based services. The open discussion which followed these presentation was lively and informative. Americans tend to forget that librarians from other cultures are not as comfortable in informal give-and-take discussions, so Marty and Julia really helped in making sure all librarians attending the workshop had a chance to be heard. (Librarians can e-mail me (ndanders@vmd.cso.uiuc.edu) for copies of these papers or abstracts.)

The Section of Science and Technology Libraries is active other than at the annual conference. We have completed and are awaiting a decision from IFLA on publication of our World Survey of Availability of Theses in Science and Technology, a guide which will tell you how to access PhD dissertations worldwide. Another project, A Feasibility Study of the Use
of Satellite Communication Channels for Electronic Data Transfer, is ongoing. The Section will be distributing Spanish- and English-language versions of its informational brochure in time for the 1994 IFLA Conference in Cuba.

IFLA's Science and Technology Libraries Section is planning a full program for this coming August in Havana, Cuba (21-28 August 1994). The theme of the general session will be Social Barriers Sci-Tech Information. We are hoping that a hurricane will not interfere with this year's program, thus breaking the jinx of previous coups, brownouts, and thunderstorms! At the Barcelona conference the Section decided not to sponsor a workshop in Havana. However, I am now exploring two opportunities which have developed. America Santos (Director, National Library of Science and Technology) has proposed a seminar with the theme, Special Libraries: Their Impact in Social Development and the Importance of New Technologies for Products and Services. Also, Monica Ertel's Information Technology Section is organizing an all-day workshop on Internet, in which we hope to participate. IFLA Headquarters reports that the convention center will offer the best facilities of any IFLA conference yet, and the lodging will be superb (how about a 5-star hotel on the beach for $65 a night?) Airlines fly from Miami, Jamaica, Canada, or Mexico. Although I haven't tried to obtain a visa yet, I've been told that the Cuban consulate in the Netherlands indicates that any person can obtain a visa on the spot in person or by mail with very little delay, and that also applies to US citizens. The Cuban Organizing Committee will be posting more information and a registration form on Internet soon.

We hope you will join us in Havana!

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