

# Sharing knowledge



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In August I attended the conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in Bangkok, my second IFLA conference and my first as a member of the Section on Education and Training committee. IFLA conferences focus on sharing knowledge about international issues affecting library associations and institutions. What is most striking to me are the similarities and differences in our professional concerns.

One very obvious difference is geographical. IFLA has, for a long time, been dominated by a European/Anglo-American culture. Holding the conference in Bangkok gave those from countries within the region more opportunity to attend and opened up the debate to many more voices. There were 305 delegates from Thailand, for example, (the largest contingent after the United States with 310) and 56 from Malaysia. Time will tell how strong those voices become and how they are listened to.

Proximity to Australia ensured that 57 delegates attended from our sector. Our geographic location has become ever more obvious in recent weeks with the East Timor crisis. Such political developments present new challenges to those in the Australian library and information field who have established links with the Indonesian sector.

The information-rich/information-poor nexus, freedom of expression and access to information are important issues, which take on fresh perspectives depending on country and, more particularly, on forms of government. Those of us from democratic countries assume freedom of access to information and debates on censorship as fundamental rights of citizenship, central to library and information services. Those from different régimes work within different parameters and do not always

understand the fervour with which we debate and defend these issues.

Ironically, the *Broadcasting Amendment (Online Services) Act* was often referred to as draconian and a worst-case example of response to content and access issues, while the draft *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Bill*, in its earlier manifestation, was held up as a best-case example of implementation of the WIPO agreement, in balancing access to traditional and digital information with the rights of copyright owners. Many delegates from information-poor countries were more concerned with getting information than with copyright.

The information-rich and -poor issue has been referred to the IFLA professional standards body for consideration and direction. In Australia, the important aspects are connectivity and information literacy.

Through committee membership and other activities, the Australian delegation achieved a high profile for our education and practice. Conference papers are available through the IFLA website at <http://www.ifla.org>.

Also on the international front, ALIA has offered to help locate sister libraries for the project being run by the US National Commission on Libraries, as part of the White House Millennium Sister Library program. Links with Byron Bay and Gold Coast libraries have been initiated, in acknowledgement of their formal sister-city agreements with Georgia and Fort Lauderdale respectively. Opportunities for further alliances are welcomed from school and public libraries. Details on the project are available from the website at <http://www.nclis.gov/millennium/millenn.html>. I am happy to assist interested libraries to participate in this project. ■



Part of the Australian contingent at the recent IFLA conference in Bangkok