

# The last word

## Borderless librarianship

I have kept my now expired passport from my 'IFLA years', that decade during which I occupied leadership positions within the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. It's a nice memento of too many hours on planes to and from destinations on all the continents and regions (except Antarctica unfortunately). It reminds me of my surprise at being met 'airside' and escorted through Customs without a pause at Algiers airport and my exhaustion while taking over 40 hours to return from Tunis, host city of the World Summit on the Information Society in November 2005.

So, is international librarianship more than passport stamps recording visits to exotic places by senior librarians? Is the attraction of IFLA merely an annual indulgence for regular attendees who visit cultural sites, savour unusual foods and meet friends? It does offer these treats – such as the opportunity to visit fabled Carthage in the suburbs of Tunis – but it offers much more, something that we cannot get in our daily practice of our profession, a form of international professional 'citizenship'.

That membership of an international professional community helps define our vocation as a profession. When we get together with colleagues from 130 or more countries as we do at IFLA's congresses, we see our profession in action in myriad responses to the needs of people in many different situations. We hear of the efforts to provide services to those in prison and those who are isolated or transcending disabilities. We interrogate the challenges of preserving the cultural forms of the past and 'catching the rainbow' of new digital media. We contribute to the development of new standards and protocols to underpin our future services or the slowly

growing international awareness of the needs of indigenous peoples. We are able to appreciate the destruction wrought by warfare as in Iraq and Sarajevo and by nature as in Aceh and Haiti – and see what we can do to help our colleagues in distress. This is truly an international professional citizenship through which we translate our professional concerns from local matters to the global level.

But there's another aspect, perhaps more significant: we gain the opportunity to see our daily professional practice and concerns reflected in the mirror of global diversity. We look afresh at librarianship in Australia to see our strengths but also where we can learn from others. We get the chance to provide some leadership and to bolster areas of our own activity.

Australian librarians attended the first global meeting of librarians and continue to make huge contributions more than a century later. The reputé in which Australian library practice is held internationally and the high standards we achieve at home are direct results of that international perspective.

ALIA's membership of IFLA – through which all of ALIA's personal and institutional members are also IFLA members – opens the door to that international perspective and to international professional citizenship. It's our passport to the 'world class' librarianship practiced in Australia and informed by global insights, standards and discourse.

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