

MAKING AN IMPACT GLOBALLY



*Outgoing IFLA President
Ingrid Parent.*

Attending an IFLA conference is a truly extraordinary experience. From a distance, it may seem just like a national conference but in a more exotic location. When you are there, you realise that IFLA is an efficient and effective way for library and information professionals to make an impact on a global scale.

This is a highly interactive forum for people who are motivated to help guide the development of strategies around lending, copyright, LIS education and training, access for readers with print disabilities, support for emerging nations and many other hot topics. In the committee rooms, on the floor of the exhibition, during the plenary sessions and conference presentations, information and ideas are exchanged, concepts are formulated and plans are laid to engage with governments and other stakeholders at the very highest level.

The five days – more if you participate in pre-conference events, satellites and library visits – are packed with opportunities to listen, learn, share and bond with professionals from every corner of the globe. Some 3500 delegates travelled from 120 countries to be at the World Library and Information Congress in Singapore from 18-22 August. Australasian delegates accounted for 231 of this number, with many of our members taking advantage of the proximity of the conference to make the trip.

IFLA is not for the faint-hearted. The program features more than 200 sessions and 23 hours of exhibition time. In addition to listening to the many speakers, delegates are invited to be observers at the standing committee meetings, gaining an insight into how the IFLA policy-making machine operates, and to participate in the caucus for their region. We are part of the Africa, Asia and Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean region.

However, IFLA is not only designed for discussion and debate, it is also an occasion for celebration and the affirmation of professionals' belief in the principals behind library and information science.

In her moving and inspirational speech at the opening ceremony, outgoing President Ingrid Parent made specific reference to her visit to The Edge, in Brisbane, during the ALIA Information Online conference. This was one of the memorable experiences of her two year presidency. And Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Singapore's Minister for Culture and Information gained a burst of applause when he told delegates, 'As a boy, I thought librarians knew everything... I still do.'

During the conference proper, there were five themed pathways through the program built on specific areas of interest – open access and digital resources; policy, strategy and advocacy; users driving access and services; tools and techniques, and ideas, innovations, anticipating the new.

Standing committees on topics as varied as art libraries, freedom of access to information, literacy, the management of library associations, document delivery, school libraries and newspapers (to name only a few) provided the opportunity for Australians to present the achievements of our own library and information services. Taking into account our relatively small population, Australia is very well represented on standing committees, with a number of ALIA members holding office.

There is a significant cost involved in attending an IFLA conference. It is testament to the value of the event that many Australian delegates self-fund or are funded by their institutions in order to be part of this global gathering of library and information professionals.