

Interview

with Prof. Dr. Claudia Lux,
President of the IFLA,

Director General of the Foundation Central and Regional Library Berlin, Germany
to Mrs. Eva Semertzaki, editor of SYNERGASIA

Prof. Dr. Claudia Lux visited Athens to deliver the lecture: "*Coming together: politicians discover libraries; from German perspectives to international outlook*" in terms of the conference "**Library policies from local to national**" organized by the Organizing Committee for the Support of Libraries on June 11 and 12, 2009. She is currently the President of the IFLA and the Director General of the Foundation Central and Regional Library, Berlin, Germany. This interview given on June 11, 2009, was arranged by Mrs. Gerlinde Buck, Leiterin des Bereiches Information & Bibliothek, Goethe-Institut, Athen.

ES. Dr. Lux, it is inevitable for me that my first question is focused on the position you held as the President of the IFLA. Could you describe the challenges, tasks, benefits, burdens of managing the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions?

CL. IFLA has gained a growing importance during last years, especially when it started to advocate at international level with intellectual property rights organizations. In this process we developed new arguments for the existence and advancement of libraries for all in the information society. The Presidential theme is "Libraries on the Agenda" which defines the President's regimes. I wanted to take the experiences of libraries into all parts of the world and to all library associations. And I hope that it will empower librarians to advocate for libraries and library users. I am happy that this motto has been taken up and many activities are under way.

ES. Which is the mission of IFLA and how can it contribute to the development of libraries worldwide?

CL. The mission of IFLA is to support and advocate libraries all over the world and promote their voice where it is needed. IFLA contributes to the development of standards and guidelines. With its Success Stories database IFLA aims to give best practice examples to libraries around the globe. I think there is a big professional element in its contribution to libraries. IFLA directly supports the members and advocates libraries.

ES. Being the IFLA President you have the opportunity to travel and visit libraries and meet librarians all over. Are there libraries of first speed and of second speed regarding their development, progress and services provided?

CL. Yes, for sure there are libraries of first and of second speed. When you are traveling around you can see libraries that have modernized their services, hold brilliant content, provide outreach activities and high technology applications but you can also beautiful buildings. I admit that there are more new

library buildings than ever. I feel that there is a renaissance of libraries all over regarding library buildings. In some places you see libraries that take less support from the government, or libraries that are even forgotten. They face a very bad situation but even in those kinds of libraries there are wonderful librarians who do nice work especially with children.

Despite the situation, we all embrace and share the same values. It is easy to get acquaintance quickly; we have a kind of spirit that leads us. That is to serve people in better chances.

ES. *What is the appreciation libraries acquire in the community they serve and does it depend on the geographical area or continent they are located?*

CL. There is much appreciation in countries such as Finland, USA and Singapore where they create model libraries. But what I have learned is that appreciation depends on the library staff and library directors. Appreciation depends on the support of library associations and of library directors but also on the situation of each individual library.

ES. *Library statistics indicate that less people visit libraries on site compared to the virtual visits they pay. How could you explain this tendency and what can libraries do to attract more visitors?*

CL. First of all, statistics have value when they compare what is comparable at a time of three or five years and under specific parameters.

There are still many people that visit libraries. Additionally, we count virtual visits equally because we serve people and we can send them the material they search. The virtual visits must have equal importance with the on site visits. Our interest is to make libraries more attractive to visitors and there is not a contradiction between virtual and on site visitors. To modernize libraries is attractive; the digital environment in the library is attractive for people to use libraries. The library should be the hot spot and the place to meet in a city. An attractive building is also a way to catch the attention of visitors. In addition to a nice-looking building, the library becomes more attractive when it combines the right information for the users.

ES. *What are some clues and tips that libraries could follow to market themselves in the age of technology advancements and of devaluation of reading habits as consequences of the Internet penetration?*

CL. I do not see devaluation of reading. People read not only print books but also e-books, online newspapers and get information from technological products, such as video and talking books. We have to rethink what libraries are doing. We have to focus on the element of providing information. We have to concentrate on new technologies such as the e-books and think of the future of libraries.

ES. *How can libraries become valuable and beneficial for the community they serve? Are there any modern ways, such as the Idea Stores, to modernize their services?*

CL. The Idea Stores are models of libraries but there are others as well. The most important for libraries is to serve the community. You have to concentrate on quality services. You need to care for the users; to cultivate close connection with them; to have an outreach policy with them. Some libraries are excellent in their communication with users whereas other libraries have to develop new activities and integrate them into their services. An element to develop is the Web 2.0 as a feature to outreach the community.

ES. *Some people say that libraries will be replaced by the Internet because people can search and find out there everything they need. What is your opinion on this statement?*

CL. Internet is important especially for small libraries. It is an opportunity for libraries to develop traditional professional knowledge with a new tool. For us, the librarians, it is the same. We use the Internet to find what users need in the quickest way. We did the same 20 years ago with the print material before the creation of Internet. We have to train people to information literacy. It is the knowledge of the society to have access to vast amounts of information. We do not lose anything with the penetration of the Internet. However, we need new competences to cope with the technology. The competencies we acquire are important for the advocacy of libraries. They give us a good ground of advocacy. Technology encompasses the cables, the satellite communication and the computers but we talk about content. We deal with content. The content we deal with makes the profession different and the technology assists the content. Libraries are needed even in periods of economic crises. At the end the library is the best investment for economic growth.

ES. *Besides the position of the IFLA President you are the Director of the Foundation of Central and Regional Library in Berlin. In my understanding this is the outcome of cooperation. Could you describe the Foundation and its work?*

CL. In the unified Germany we had to unify two central libraries: the Berlin City Library and the America Memorial Library. These two libraries are brought into a Foundation. I became the first Director General. My task was to do the real unification: from the East to the West. The Berlin City Library was the East and the America Memorial Library was the West with its research collection. Since 2005 the Foundation has integrated the Senate Library (the administrative library of Berlin). My task was to unify two elements in one. I was quite successful to work out on this. We do not have any problems, we have developed new services, such as the e-learning department where people can learn languages and have other learning material. We are part of the QuestionPoint in terms of our international activities.

ES. *How can the Foundation contribute to the welfare of the society and become visible?*

CL. What we try to do is to have special projects, e.g. a project devoted to 17-year old teenagers on information literacy. They find what they need. We become visible because we have non-book

material and have digital activities that young people like the most. We have started the RFID (Radio Frequency Identity) project that enables people to lend e-books easily. It is a challenge for us.

***ES.** You have got your doctoral degree in Sinology and have dealt with the library system in China. How can you compare the Chinese and the Western library system?*

CL. The Chinese library system has changed a lot in the last 15 years, especially since 1996 after the IFLA conference in Beijing. They are very active in digitization projects. They have developed big regional libraries such as a library of 120.000 m² of space. Most of the regional – state library occupy a space of about 30.000 – 70.000 m². These new libraries are modern as regards both buildings and the technology. They have different access policies because of political or economic reasons, e.g. they sell information. At the end, Chinese libraries have changed a lot.

***ES.** Library policies are the foundation stone of the organization and development of the library system in a country. They provide directions and guidelines to libraries and stimulate cooperation. What are the main areas that library policies enhance the development of libraries in Germany?*

CL. The main areas that library policies enhance the development of libraries in Germany are the umbrella of the German Library Association. The umbrella is the 21 good arguments for good libraries. It was built on the activities of the Enquette Commission of Culture of the German Bundestag. It was important because libraries present their needs and the Commission puts them in programs of cultural development in Germany. This is only one step. We have to fight for realization of the arguments. We want to have a library law. As a result of the actions taken by the Commission, one of the 16 states has a library act. There are more advocacies to develop library acts and law in all states.

***ES.** Which external factors can influence library policies, e.g. politicians and politics?*

CL. One of the external factors that influence library policies is politicians. Libraries have to take up. The politicians need the activities of libraries to promote themselves, but libraries can prepare the arguments, range the possibilities and know what to request. We cannot wait for a wonder. We have to influence politicians and let them know what we want from them to do. Libraries must be on the political agenda.

***ES.** Libraries in Greece are working on different speeds. Academic libraries are more developed than municipal or school libraries. We also lack library policies in general. What could you suggest to Greek librarians to improve their library services and become competitive with libraries abroad?*

CL. In many communities, academic libraries are more developed than municipal libraries in areas such as e-books and services. Very often though municipal libraries provide good services same as academic libraries.

In Greece the Library Association has to cooperate with all stakeholders of libraries not matter who they are. You have to get a broader cooperation to develop library policies in general and that is not

easy at all. Greek libraries can become competitive especially in the digital era. The library school could change its curriculum because if you do not have the quality in the profession, you cannot advocate library services. It is important for libraries to work together and be cooperative and try to find a common goal.

An example comes from another country. All libraries talked bad on each other. During a meeting it took 2.30 hours to find a common goal. They finally found a goal which was to build one library on each village.

Libraries have to rethink on the one goal which unifies all of them and takes them forward and brings them all in a new shape. It makes more sense for the director of a library association when s/he talks on e-books than reading a book as such. It must interrelate and be consistent. We have to develop ourselves, too.

ES. Dr. Lux, on behalf of the Committee for the Support of Libraries, and as editor of SYNERGASIA, I would like to thank you very much for your time and your inspiring ideas and information you provided us.

CL. Thank you, too!