

75th IFLA Congress Milan

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In 2006, at Seoul IFLA Congress, Italy was awarded the hospitality for the 75th Congress, that will be held in Milan, in the premises of the trade Fair, from 23rd to 27th August 2009, under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic. When IFLA decided, in 2006, to hold its congress in the South of Europe, a few cities – Lisbon, Rimini, Florence and Milan – applied to host the event.

The eligibility requirements were: the presence of a congress palace and a hotel system suitable for hosting from four to five thousand delegates, being easily reachable by plane, train and car and the fact of having important libraries. The AIB (Associazione Italiana Biblioteche = Italian Libraries Association) announced at once Italy's candidacy which was supported by the Ministry for Cultural Activities (MiBAC), by Regione Lombardia, Milan Province and Municipality. After several meetings in the different venues (Rimini was not included for the lack of a few requirements) and at the Aja office of IFLA, Milan won the nomination. I still remember our exultation as Italian members present in South Korea, right after the announcement of the IFLA President Alex Byrne: we enthusiastically waved the Italian flag that we were given by the Ambassador Mr. Andrea Leggeri at the Italian Embassy.

IFLA Congress comes back to Italy after 45 years from the previous edition, a long time which shows, unfortunately, the lack of interest, these last forty years, of Italian libraries in the international dimension. Not an overall passivity, of course, because some librarians and teachers have always kept international relations, but probably on a personal basis and referring to institutions different from IFLA. The limited number of active members at the IFLA conferences caused, in the mid-seventies, the abolition of Italian as official language. It is a shame because IFLA congress is the most important meeting for librarians and people dealing professionally with libraries and

bibliographic information. Every possible subject in the wide world of library science is in fact dealt with in the different parallel sessions held in the five hectic days of the meeting.

IFLA Conferences in Italy and the birth of AIB

Italy is very tightly linked to IFLA as it hosted in Rome (15/30 June 1929) the *First World Congress of Libraries and Bibliography*, attended by about 1.300 librarians, coming from forty countries, who met Pio XI, "a previous and old colleague" as he called himself, Achille Ratti, previously Prefect of Ambrosiana Library of Milan and of the Vatican Library.

This Congress is considered the first one for IFLA and it was attended by delegations of several countries and of the Society of Nations as well as the associations linked to the International Library and Bibliographical Committee which was set up in 1928 in Edinburgh as core of IFLA.

IFLA was formally founded in Venice on June 30th, in the wonderful setting of the Biblioteca Marciana, where the International Library and Bibliographical Committee moved from Rome. The text of the statute has been written a few days earlier in a hotel in Florence during a stopover on the way from the Capital.

From this historical experience skilfully directed by Luigi De Gregori, starts in 1930 the promoting Committee of the Italian Librarians Association (later named Italian Association for Libraries and finally Italian Libraries Association) made up by council and state librarians with Pier Silverio Leicht as chairman. He was a law historian and deputy who, at the worldwide libraries Congress of bibliography, represented the government as an undersecretary of minister Belluzzo and chaired the technical commission responsible for the choice of relations. "So, at last", Simonetta Buttò and Alberto Petrucciani mention (see <www.ifla2009.it>) "on June 11th 1930 in the bureau of a notary in Rome, President Leicht, vice presidents Salvagnini and Bonazzi, treasurer De Gregori, counselors

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Calcagno and Boselli and secretary Mancini signed the certificate of incorporation of AIB. As soon as the act was signed a celebration was organized at Caffè Aragno, the usual meeting place of scholars, journalists and Roman politicians”.

The second and third IFLA congresses kept in Italy were again in Rome, in 1951 and 1964. In 2009, 80 years later than the first World congress of libraries and bibliography and 45 since the last world meeting, Italy is still hosting the Congress of librarians. This event is a great success for the whole Italian librarian community and rewards the qualified, intelligent and constructive engagement of many Italian librarians who have been working within IFLA and on the international scene.

During a whole week the Congress Centre of Fiera Milano City will give hospitality to about 5000 delegates coming, from all over the world, who will attend several technical meetings and will be able to visit the wide exposition of products and services for libraries.

The title chosen for 2009, *Libraries create futures: building on cultural heritage*, well represents the peculiarities of Italian libraries as a moment of contact between the roots of history and the technologies of the future. The Italian libraries will have a chance of showing the achievements and projects being carried out to the international librarian community.

Towards Milan Congress: IFLA's role, the organization of the Congress and the engagements of the Italian National Committee

At Québec IFLA Congress in 2008, the Italian National Committee IFLA 2009 (NC) made the official invitation to IFLA Congress in Milan from

23 to 27 August 2009 (<http://it.youtube.com/watch?v=hnnxNrdiAHk&feature=related>).

Since then the National Committee has been working for the success of this almost unique chance of professional updating for many Italian librarians.

As a start, the Italian Committee tried to promote the aims of IFLA, which is an international librarian association formed by about 1700 national associations, big libraries and, in a smaller number, by librarians. IFLA represents

(directly or indirectly) about 500.000 libraries in 150 countries and librarians all over the world giving them a place for sharing ideas and promoting international cooperation and the development in library science (which technically is called *advocacy*). The social values of IFLA are: creating and supplying high quality library services and supporting the principles of free



Seoul, 72th IFLA Congress (2006): Mauro Guerrini taking the floor just after Milan has been chosen as congressional seat for IFLA Conference in 2009

access to information, ideas and intellectual achievements (as from article 19 of ONU *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*). Its aims are promoting standards for the creation and supply of library services and making both politicians and citizens aware of the importance to have good library services. Sections and work groups draw the guidelines and recommendations about the different aspects of the library service, often used in different countries as a basis for the preparation of local and national services. IFLA is, in fact, the prescriptive board of all services for libraries and librarians, decides the standards which are later translated and used by libraries and agencies all over the world.

On a second instance, the Italian Committee related to the Italian librarians, who had not attended IFLA congresses, about the way they work. It is not easy to understand the structure and the organization and a newcomer could miss



Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Sala Teresiana, Milan. IFLA Congress delegates will have the opportunity of visiting this famous library

the great depth of the professional debate which is held in the three main moments:

- in the plenary sessions (*opening ceremony, plenary session*- meetings with Italian and foreign authors (Nicoletta Maraschio, Benedetta Cibrario, Carla Fracci), with IFLA President now in office (Carla Lux) and the elected President (Ellen Tise) – *closing ceremony*);
- in the *open sessions e nelle offsite sessions* (meetings held out of the Congress premises), organized by the sections and study groups where the participants get trained on up-to-date themes;
- in the internal meetings of the Standing Committees and of the study groups, as a fundamental moment of scientific work open to accredited observers. Their activity lasts all year round with debates via electronic mail and meetings and it can involve experts from outside the Sections.

During the Congress there are also the *poster sessions*, often required by a *call for paper* and then judged by experts of the Governing Board. The three best *posters* are given an award during the *closing ceremony*.

Satellite meetings are held before and after the Congress: in 2009 there will be 19 in different Italian cities and in a few European ones, always organized by the Sections. It is, therefore, clear

that the program of the Congress is mostly due to the Sections that decide on their own the titles of the *open* and the *offsite sessions*. Italian members of the sections favored the presentation of Italian contributions and experiences. IFLA Congress will be a special occasion to know what is going on abroad and let foreign colleagues know what happens in Italy. Italy can be proud of excellent experiences that are sometimes kept inside the libraries or among a few people. IFLA 2009 could be a chance for showing and promoting what has been done by Italian librarians.

During the Congress there will be visits to libraries, a social event and a cultural evening, which are all very important moments of meeting with colleagues from all

over the world. In Milan, the cultural evening will be at La Scala, on August 23rd with a lyrical concert and the social event at Galleria Vittorio Emanuele on August 25th. Another special hint of the Congress is the *Exhibition*, the exposition of the products and services for the libraries, representing a place for professional information and meeting with firms showing their products. Finally, the main decisions for the life of the Association will be taken by IFLA Assembly (since 2009 this name will be used instead of IFLA Council).

In order to improve and favor an active participation to the Congress, the National Committee, along with AIB, has been promoting several meetings for all librarians.

Libraries create futures: building on cultural Heritage. The Programme of the Congress

The theme will be dealt with two different perspectives: the Angloamerican one based on the epistemology of knowledge and on the social role of the libraries and the perspective of Mediterranean origin based on the organization and the conservation of ancient and unique collections witnessing a long and rich cultural tradition. What are the proposals of IFLA Sections at the

Congress? The discussion about “cultural heritage” has widened the traditional themes including also cultural and political ones as well as archives and museums. Some sections will deal with the theme of “cultural heritage” in a more traditional sense, that is mostly as conservation, such as the sections Art Libraries, with the title *Art and cultural heritage: select, collect and connect*; Bibliography, with the title *Promoting and preserving national bibliographies, our testimony of cultural heritage*; Rare Books and Manuscripts, Preservation and Conservation and Library History, with the title *Dispersed cultural collections. Preservation, reconstruction and access*. Other sections had rather think about the future, as Academic and Research Libraries, with the title *Hot topics in academic and research libraries: discussion with experts and colleagues*; Public Libraries and Metropolitan Libraries, with the title *The future of metropolitan public libraries*.

Other sections will show the possible “convergence of archives, libraries and museums”, studying the challenges of this fact for the integration of services in the world of internet as well as for professional training. Examples are the

meetings *LIS Education in Developing Countries SIG: Preparing future librarians in developing countries: a vision for LIS education in the 21st century*.

“Cultural heritage” will be therefore at the centre of many professional debates.

What is considered particularly important for professionals, writes Anna Maria Tamaro, member of IFLA Governing body (see: <www.ifla2009.it>), is the social role of library and librarian. “An active role of mediation and promotion is expected from professionals together with a more traditional role tied to preservation and conservation, but renewed with the application of new technologies. The social role on support to learning adds up with the mediation role, engaging also in alphabetization programs in order to improve the access to “cultural heritage” cooperating with archives and museums”.

IFLA Congress Milan 2009 is, so, an organizational but, even more, a cultural challenge, a unique occasion to draw attention and visibility on libraries, a sector that in Italy is rich of examples of invaluable worth, not always appreciated.