

Educating Professionals for a Global Vision: No Past, No Future

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Since its beginning, IFLA has been concerned with education and training, creating guidelines and standards for educational quality. Ninety years after the first IFLA Conference, IFLA Satellite returned to the Vatican Library with the aim of stimulating a high-level conversation on the future of librarians. This article is a reflection on the IFLA's role in the past and in the present for education and training and the impact of IFLA Global Vision on the education of new professionals. The main results of the conversation during the Satellite are that librarians are no longer the ones who mediate in a passive role between the communities and the collection but have been transformed into active agents of the community and, within it, "facilitators" of knowledge. The mutability of the global world context means that competencies must be reviewed and adapted to new operative instruments. The IFLA Global Vision and a focus on strong value bases may help librarians outline a more solid mission. Among the new disciplines emergent in the LIS context, technology and informatics are fundamental. The competencies in education have emphasized also the fundamental knowledge of research methods and critical abilities in analyzing the results. Nevertheless, librarians are not only users of research; they actively contribute to research and need practical abilities in programming and realization of research projects. From what emerged during the Rome Satellite, LIS is being enriched by new technological, ethical, and social aspects that should be inserted into future curricula and will become part of the librarian's identity. The very rethinking of professional identity has in itself brought a transformation in the LIS discipline, in which the concepts of digital inclusion, social inclusion, and lifelong learning are central.

Keywords: BSLISE, future of librarians, library and information science (LIS) education, IFLA Global Vision, IFLA Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs, research methods

IFLA is the international body for professional library associations and libraries and has always been concerned with bettering the quality of

professional education. The Education and Training Section of IFLA has been carefully creating instruments such as standards and guidelines and continuously revising and updating these instruments. Nevertheless, the challenges now for librarians are complex; for some, the profession has been overtaken by Internet and digital technology, while for others there is a need for reconsideration of its role and a serious transformation.

Global Vision is an IFLA project begun in 2017 and involving the entire professional community in agreeing on an idea of a library, which is “A strong and united library field powering literate, informed and participative societies” (IFLA, 2018). The Global Vision has concentrated on three aspects: the challenges posed by society that render the future uncertain, the role of libraries in society, and the transformation necessary to fulfill this role. Librarians are no longer the ones who mediate in a passive role between the patrons and the collection but have been transformed into active agents of the community and, within it, “facilitators” of knowledge: They create and improve the learning capacities and levels of knowledge of the patrons, or rather the members of the community. Therefore, they must be in contact with the community, engage its members, and facilitate their learning. They then take on a double role: ethical, in the sense that they guarantee the right to access to information and freedom of expression, and political, because they place as their aim the development of their community’s decision-making powers. Thus, for example, the professionals are engaged in the fight for transparency in democracies, while they can contribute to the technological

KEY POINTS:

- The challenges now for librarians are complex; for some, the profession has been overtaken by Internet and digital technology, while for others there is a need for a reconsideration of its role and a serious transformation. Librarians must be in contact with the community, engage its members, and facilitate their learning. They then take on a double role: ethical, in the sense that they guarantee the right to access to information and freedom of expression, and political, because they place as their aim the development of their community’s decision-making powers.
- The problem of competence fragmentation has been discussed, with possible consequences such as weakening the professional identity, and the need for a reconceptualization of LIS. The “core” competencies, however, are not easily identified. The “core” cannot be understood as the identity that remains the same forever.
- It is no longer possible to think in terms of a standard curriculum, as it is a transformation and/or evolution of a process that renders absolutely necessary the constant updating of the curricula while keeping the librarian’s values and mission stable.

evolution of information capacity and competence in avoiding fake news, and facing effective monopolies they can defend the community against the concentration of information. If up to now the librarians' education has tried to adapt to changes brought by information technologies, it must now transform professionals' behavior to meet this new role.

The Satellite "Transforming LIS education for professionals in a global information world: Digital inclusion, social inclusion and lifelong learning,"¹ held in the Vatican Library, placed librarian education in the center of the debate about Global vision. The Satellite wanted ideally to recall, 90 years later, the place in which IFLA came into existence in 1929, after the International Conference in Edinburgh (1927). It was in fact in the Vatican Library at Rome that an associative commission met, elected directors, and elaborated and published a manifesto to which many conservation and library entities adhered.

The Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana has symbolic value for all libraries. The Vatican Library is an important example of transformation in a centuries-old institution that has always tried to face new challenges and cultural changes, transforming itself and keeping up to date and in the avant garde. Even in recent times it was in fact the Vatican Library that was among the first to introduce automation, adopt international cataloging standards, and finance digitization projects that are mostly still underway.

The Vatican Library has always paid attention to the question of education and training and in 1934 opened the Vatican Library School, soon after and almost consequently the IFLA meeting of 1929. From its very beginning the School has been very closely tied to the Library, in a synergy that benefits both institutions. Thus not only are new professionals educated, but it also holds conferences and study days open to former students and to the library's personnel, underlining the importance of continuous professional development.

In the symbolic context of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the IFLA Satellite sought a reflection and rethinking of LIS education and of the role of the library in realizing the Global Vision: What is a "core" curriculum? What are the new emerging profiles? What research methodologies are taught in support of transformation? This paper is a reflection on the IFLA's role in education and underlines the main results of the discussion during the Satellite.

Why transform LIS education?

The world economy is increasingly global and linked to technological evolution: The Internet and networks make it possible to produce services in place and deliver them to the other side of the world. This difference in channels of fruition has a big impact on libraries themselves and questions their future role. Paradoxically, however, Global Vision has evidenced at least ten opportunities that libraries can (and indeed should) take advantage of, including the tendency for greater democratization and

transparency, greater demand for lifelong learning, learning that becomes collaborative, and information and media literacy needs to defend people from an overload of information and provide knowledge of how to recognize fake news. The library is more than ever the center of democratic societies and has a social value to be communicated to all actors.

LIS education requires reconceptualizing the role of librarians, not as handmaidens but as active partners and leaders in shaping the library and information ecosystem. Attracting new leaders in the profession is a need that is well recognized by all IFLA Sections, as is the need to re-tool staff through continuous professional development programs.

How should we develop leaders and integrate or transform traditional education with new competencies? The Global Vision initiative plans to realize its vision of libraries in 2022. LIS education, in preparing future LIS professionals, has two forecasts to make. First, to plan programs until 2022, it must have a vision of what the LIS field will look like at least 20 years from now, as its graduates will be working at that time. Second, it has to include in its programs the needs and requirements that LIS employers will demand in the next five years.

An international profession: The past

IFLA has affirmed that the profession of librarian is international and that all librarians should have a degree in library science, having studied in librarianship in a university, as either an undergraduate or postgraduate, or both. A principle that IFLA adopted at the very beginning is that of respecting the autonomy of each library school. On this premise, in 1976 the IFLA Education and Training Section designed a first Standard Curriculum, based on twelve areas of knowledge (IFLA, 1976), broad enough to encompass the standards already developed by national professional associations but with the ability to guide whoever wished to develop a new curriculum in library science. This first standard had a twofold aim: on the one hand, to define the identity of the profession and single out values that will be valid forever; and, on the other, to free the profession from a strictly technical education and tie it to a university education, with appropriate teaching and a specific research methodology. A preamble of definitions precedes the Standard Curriculum, defining what is meant by library, librarianship, and associated disciplines such as documentation, information science, and informatics. The definition of librarianship is as follows:

Librarianship: The profession that is concerned with the systematic organization of knowledge in all its various formats and its dissemination for the purpose of preserving the society's cultural heritage, promoting scholarship and the generation of new knowledge. The practitioners employ the skills and processes of library science, documentation and information science to make graphic records available to meet the specific needs of its clientele according to the level of service required. (IFLA, 1976, p. 212)

The updating of the Standard was carried out by the Education and Training Section in two separate revisions of the curriculum in 2000 and 2012, changing its name to Guidelines. In the first revision of 2000 (IFLA, 2000), the initialism LIS (library and information science) was introduced: The discipline is the combination of library science and information science, thus ratifying the prevalent usage of recent years. The Guidelines define the new context in reference to the profession transformed by the Internet and how this has had an impact on the instruments and work methods:

Today library information programs extend beyond the physical collections and buildings to the virtual world of the Internet. Today the emphasis is on the individual practitioner and the concentration is on information provision in a variety of contexts. (IFLA, 2000)

This first revision introduces for the first time the transversal abilities or “soft skills” that are recognized as important in a time of change:

Methods of teaching and assessment should be designed to develop or enhance students’ interpersonal communication skills, ability to work in teams, and time and task management skills. At the professional level, emphasis should be placed on developing students’ analytical and problem-solving skills. (IFLA, 2000)

In 2012, the Guidelines were updated with the collaboration of the IFLA Sections, and the result was an elaboration of an essentially unchanged curriculum subdivided into 11 macro areas: from the abilities needed to carry forward the information cycle (generation, communication, and use) to dialogue with the user (understanding of user needs and personalization of services), to the capacities of research and the evaluation of effects and impact on the community (IFLA, 2012). The Guidelines recognize that a major change is underway wherein traditional methods and instruments are being transformed thanks to digital technologies: “It is important that the core curriculum elements as listed below . . . [i]nclude methods of the past as pathways to methods in a digitised environment . . .” (IFLA, 2012, p. 4).

An international profession: The present

The changes behind the transformation of education to realize the Global Vision were a central concern of the IFLA Working Group BSLISE (Building Strong LIS Education Working Group) that was formed at the end of the 2016 Satellite Meeting in Dublin (Ohio, United States). The Working Group meeting to ascertain the status of LIS education (what qualifications are needed, which professional associations accredit the courses or certify the professionals, what are the credits for continuous professional development, etc.) has published the results of the inquiry

that was examined by diverse institutions in 101 countries (IFLA BSLISE, 2018). The White Paper report's results show a heterogeneous situation that also—surprisingly—has affinities and points of convergence; in particular, the institutions have paid special attention to determining the “core,” understood as the essential aspects of the LIS curriculum.

A key conclusion of the BSLISE White Paper report suggested that

[a] formal undergraduate or graduate degree is required in many countries; however, there is no correspondence/equivalence among degrees; for many programs, there is no international or recognized standard against which they can be benchmarked for transferability or reciprocity. (IFLA BSLISE, 2018, p. 1)

The White Paper identified the recommended action to “identify core and other competencies for transferability and reciprocity” (IFLA BSLISE, 2018, p. 2).

These “core” competencies, however, are not easily identified. The “core” cannot be understood as the identity that remains the same forever. The mutability of the context means that competencies must be reviewed and adapted to new operative instruments. As Lankes (2011, p. 33) underlines, “[a] mission, vision, or goal provides a yardstick by which to gauge efforts and judge options. When librarians are faced with decisions, as they increasingly are in times of tight budgets, they must have some means of making the decision.”

Only with the creation of a vision of the world—in this context that of the library—on strong values bases may one outline a more solid mission and allow the functions to change along with the context, while the identity remains stable. In synthesis, in order to remain universally valid (outside of space and time) the librarian's identity should not be tied only to their duties but also to their self-perception, values, and attitudes.

Reflecting on these themes during the first day of the Rome Satellite, we have discussed the problem of the fragmentation of competencies, with possible consequences such as weakening the professional identity and the need for a reconceptualization of LIS. Jaya Raju took sociologist Andrew Abbott's theses as a model and proposed studying LIS as a discipline in evolution, composed of two separate phases: interstitial capabilities and fractal capabilities (see Raju, this volume). The former means that LIS appears to be a receptive and absorbing discipline. Metaphorically it could be compared to a box—closely connected to others inside a warehouse—into which diverse competencies may be placed and in which they accumulate and broaden; the warehouse represents the cognitive context while the other boxes are other disciplines, some liminal and others more distant, that enter into rapport with it because they are participants in the same process. In this phase, which is currently under way, library and information science is attempting to formulate its identity: The new challenges are causing new competencies to emerge

and stand beside the older ones. In the second phase we will want to underline the re-emergence of traditional ideas and concepts in new clothing, which in time and with the integration and metabolization of their multidisciplinary nature will bring a phase of synthesis and elaboration of a new theory.

Among the new disciplines emergent in the LIS context, technology and informatics are fundamental. The changes dictated by digitalization have transformed the librarians' instruments and work. This innovation has been seen as a possibility to extend services, create an international professional context, and broaden knowledge and eliminate the digital divide, both in the technological sense (between users and non-users) and in the cultural (between those who have higher education and those who do not). In the last 20 years, much use of these practices has gone into the digitalization of document material, which when put online becomes, at least potentially, available to everyone. Ricardo L. Punzalan, in his talk at the Rome Satellite, pointed out that the digitalization of the cultural heritage of archives, libraries, and museums poses entirely new problems of access and privacy. The librarian, especially when handling ethnological or anthropological material, must become the voice of the community concerned, discuss with its members, understand their culture, and disseminate it while respecting their usages and traditions, even if these contrast with his or her own. The librarian then must take an active role in mediating, informing, protecting, and including minorities. Closely tied to this argument is that of the evaluation of these efforts. The impact of digitalization has been quantitatively evaluated for a long time, but we have realized that these indicators are not capable of explaining the changes that the spread of these materials has generated in individuals or in the collective. To this end, Punzalan has proposed the adoption of a qualitative research method to measure the impact that is based on interviews and focus groups, which gives us more complex feedback than simple numbers. The management of ethnographic archives online has exposed the delicate social roles of the librarian: protect minorities and identities within the perspective of a globalized world, work toward social inclusion, favor dialogue and exchange with the rest of the community (for example, through laboratories, exhibitions, thematic portals), and evaluate the impact of the services, trying to increase the positive aspects and minimize the negative.

Education in research methodology is an essential component of professional information education and for librarians of the twenty-first century. The first IFLA Standard of 1976 stated that "[s]tudents should be required to engage in formal inquiry or research, at appropriate levels, and to present their results in acceptable written form" (IFLA, 1976, p. 220). Also, if the competencies in education have traditionally emphasized the fundamental knowledge of research methods and critical abilities in analyzing the results, the research methods are not always

taught. Nevertheless, librarians are not only users of research, but they also actively contribute to research and need practical abilities in programming and carrying out research projects. Research competencies, inclusive of the theoretical fundamentals of quantitative and qualitative research methods, appear on many lists of basic competencies such as those of the American Library Association (ALA, 2009). Courses on research methods are offered in many LIS programs but are not necessarily considered to be part of the “core” curriculum.

From what emerged during the Rome Satellite, LIS is being enriched by new technological, ethical, and social aspects that should be inserted into future curricula and will become part of the librarian’s identity. Having a profound sense of oneself and of the profession will mean being ready to face future risks and opportunities. To repeat the words of David Lankes (2011, p. 169),

The future is uncertain. New opportunities and new threats will emerge that I can’t even dream of in writing this. The only way you can be prepared is to have a strong sense of self and profession (a worldview based on durable concepts), a strong sense of values, a set of usable broad competencies to address the unexpected, and a healthy tolerance for ambiguity.

LIS curriculum must keep this combination in mind. Teaching must not be presented as a simple professional apprenticeship, and at the center of the discourse must be those values to be transmitted, the core elements that remain stable even during “tempestuous” changes in context.

From this perspective, teaching institutions must undertake to maintain continuing education for their professionals; librarians not only are responsible for their own and others’ learning but also undertake lifelong learning. Indeed, lifelong learning has become a central element in LIS, as Lankes (2011, p. 121) makes clear:

To become a librarian is to become a lifelong learner. To be a true facilitator requires constant learning about the community, about the topics the community deems important, and about the process of facilitation. Your degree is not a ticket of completion but a lifelong commitment to devote yourself to constant study.

The importance of being one who learns constantly manifests itself in various characteristics of the librarian: openness, transparency, availability, intellectual freedom, and honesty. These are the characteristics that give value to the profession, while specific abilities are tied to the cultural context and situation and are thus subject to change.

An international profession: The future

The Satellite Meeting in Rome was an occasion for the IFLA Sections and the other professional associations involved in its organization—ALISE

and ASIS&T—to begin a conversation about the librarian’s identity and the future of the profession.

In our global hyperconnected context, librarians may not be merely refined technicians, connoisseurs of their collections and intermediaries between the collections and the members of the community, but must be the facilitators and promoters of learning (guaranteeing to everyone the possibility of access to information), knowledge (bettering their constituent communities’ ability to search for information), context (giving support, ensuring equality of participation and security), and motivation (stimulating participation), with the aim of bettering the social context in which they operate. Librarians, furthermore, are scholars and researchers: Their activities help to increase the prestige and value of the institution in which they work. Today librarians have become activists: They set ethical objectives, take positions, act on the basis of their own values (remaining neutral and impartial makes no sense, as the choice of one resource rather than another is already a condition), and provide services.

The very rethinking of professional identity has in itself brought a transformation in the discipline. Modern LIS is participatory because it includes an exchange with communities based on conversation in which the concepts of digital inclusion, social inclusion, and lifelong learning are central. It is no longer possible to think in terms of a “standard curriculum,” as it is a transformation and/or evolution of a process that renders absolutely necessary the constant updating of the curricula while keeping stable the librarian’s values and mission.

Librarians of the future will thus be receptive (ready to interpret changes) and proactive (propositive), ready to encounter diverse research contexts and to be true interpreters of the needs of the community. In short, it means responding to the same problems as in the past but in a new context, involving different instruments and a new idea of the library itself.

According to the young co-authors of this article, librarians of the future should have a 360° background to be able to move easily in different contexts and disciplines in order to be able to satisfy patrons’ requests (if we may still call them that!). Hyperspecialization could be professionally limiting, while it could be advantageous if acquired during lifelong learning (we are thinking of the possibilities of increased research quality when carried out by a specialist). Furthermore, the librarian of the future should have a set of soft skills that includes very strong problem-solving ability.

In conclusion, in the minds of the co-authors of this article, librarians should be like high-wire artists; they must balance the traditions of the past and the challenges of the present. They should think of library conservation; after all, librarians work with books, they must not forget the collections, and books must be curated and conserved both as container and content. They should not be kept from readers because a digital version is available but must be consultable (here we are thinking of librarians

in institutes that conserve, like the Vatican or the numerous libraries of their kind in Italy). Librarians should also think of digitalization and metadata, so they need to acquire specific competencies and technology languages; of document delivery and then of the diverse and innovative loan forms; of ethical problems connected to culturally sensitive materials and of the numerous implications tied to data curation in a digital environment; of communication abilities and thus the study of marketing and fundraising campaigns.

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Endnote

1. The IFLA Satellite was held from August 30–31, 2019, at the Vatican Library in Rome. Three IFLA sections—Library Theory and Research, Education and Training, and Information Technology, in collaboration with the Vatican Library, ASIS&T, and ALISE—were the organizers of the Satellite. See <https://iflasatellitevatican2019.wordpress.com>.