

IFLA/FAIFE

INTERVIEWS WITH P. STURGES AND B. JONES

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The 6th Roundtable on Free access to information and freedom of expression and Workshop on anti-corruption were held in Zagreb, Croatia on December 8-9, 2006 in conjunction of the Croatian FAIFE, Department of Information Science of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb and IFLA/FAIFE.. After the meeting, the interviews were conducted with two prominent conference speakers : Paul Sturges (Chair of IFLA/FAIFE) and Barbara Jones (FAIFE Executive Board member). Paul Sturges participated as a key note speaker and moderator of the part dedicated to the role of libraries in fight against corruption. Barbara Jones spoke about privacy in the digital environment. Both interviews were conducted by e mail, translated into Croatian, and will be published in the forthcoming issue of the Croatian LA Newsletter -- www.hkdrustvo.hr/novosti -- in Croatian only.

The interview with Paul Sturges

M. S.-F. Beside multiple duties and positions you maintain as professor, councillor and lecturer in many countries of the world, you're also the Chair of the IFLA / FAIFE. What does this position mean to you?

P.S. *To me, being Chair of FAIFE represents the peak of my professional life. It offers the chance to make a contribution on issues that matter to me a great deal and, which I know matter to the profession as a whole a great deal too. It is an honour, but first of all a responsibility. More than that it is exciting, demanding work.*

M. S.-F. Though the ideas of intellectual freedom are not new, it's only recently (1998) that IFLA established FAIFE as one of it's core activities. Could you tell us what were the reasons for that, the new problems related to information ethics (impact of ICT on free access to information) or was it more about censorship and other «classic» obstacles to free access to information? What's your assertion of FAIFE's success in combat for intellectual freedom issues since it's foundation?

P.S. *I think that the information and library profession is a maturing profession. For some decades, or even centuries, it saw its role in a rather narrow, technical way. Care of books, cataloguing, bibliographies were typical of its raison d'etre. In recent times, the profession has come to see that it actually achieves a great deal in society through the value that it provides for individuals and organisations, and that it can go on to have a greater role in society than it used to believe. At first, as far as FAIFE was concerned, this was seen as including a role in combatting censorship and helping to remove obstacles to free access. Now I think we see the role as a broader and more pro-active, promoting access and improvements to access as essential concerns of the profession. Our work is not just defensive, it involves education and advocacy both within the profession and with a wider public.*

M. S.-F. The debate on the Danish Cartoons at the WLIC IFLA in Seoul in August 2006,

that was organized by FAIFE, showed how delicate freedom of expression issues could be. What's the FAIFE's general attitude regarding this case?

***P.S.** FAIFE's position is always that freedom of expression and freedom of access are paramount. However, it is not enough to simply assert this when difficulties like the Danish cartoons affair occur. The importance of freedom must be explained in a persuasive way, taking into account the sensitivities of particular groups, like for instance Muslims. It's a delicate task and I hope the debate in Seoul and my subsequent article in IFLA Journal have taken the right kind of approach.*

M. S.-F. It was for the first time the 6th Roundtable on Free Access to Information of the Croatian FAIFE and Faculty of Philosophy Department of information Science was organised in conjunction with IFLA/FAIFE in Zagreb in December 2006. You participated as coorganiser, invited speaker and Chair of the Workshop on anti corruption. What's the connection between Roundtables' themes : professional and information ethics, and role of libraries in fight against corruption...? What's your overall opinion on the organisation and programme of the meeting?

***P.S.** An organisation like FAIFE, which has limited funds and personnel, relies very much on trusted friends and colleagues. We're confident in Croatian colleagues and taking our Workshop to Zagreb was an easy decision. Members of the Croatian Library Association may not understand how outstanding the Croatian contribution to FAIFE has been over the years. But Croatia has been one of a small number of the very best sources of support. Mentioning individuals always risks seeming to devalue the work of other contributors, but it is important to me to stress that the dedicated work of Alka Horvat for FAIFE in Croatia has been of the highest value.*

M. S.-F. Would you explain shortly the concept of transparency and it's possible role for libraries in fight against corruption? Why and how should libraries get involved in the worldwide struggle against corruption?

***P.S.** Transparency is just a way of expressing the social role of freedom of access to information in a word. The metaphor 'Sunshine is the best remedy' sums it up rather well. If people know what is happening in the centres of economic, political and social power then they can organise for improvement, and also live their individual lives more successfully. Combatting corruption is more effective when we have access to information about our rights and entitlements and about the way in which people in positions of power are exercising that power.*

M. S.-F. What has FAIFE expected from the Zagreb Workshop and did the Workshop achieve it's goals? «Transparency and fight against corruption» is the FAIFE's annual theme in 2007. How will FAIFE develop this topic in the future=

***P.S.** The FAIFE Workshop was a big success. We wanted the issues discussed thoroughly as a basis for a programme of alerting libraries to their possible contribution to the struggle against corruption. This is a new topic and a new approach. First we needed to talk it through and identify directions forward. We obtained exactly this from the Workshop, first in the form of the Croatian Library Associations's Declaration, and second in the form of a kind of 'shopping list' of topics that FAIFE can work on. This work will be moved forward at FAIFE's WLIC satellite at the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg before the Durban conference in 2007.*

M. S.-F. In the end, as a frequent guest in Croatia you're familiar with many Croatian

librarians and libraries. Do you wish to add something special for the readers of the Croatian LA Newsletter?

***P.S.** My first visit to Croatia was in 1989 for one of Neva Tudor Silovic's Dubrovnik conferences. I was very impressed with the Croatian professionals I met and I guess I also fell in love with the country. I put it that way round (respect for the professionals and love for the country) as I wouldn't want it to seem that I merely visit Croatia because of friends, lifestyle and places (but I do also visit Croatia for friends, lifestyle and places). I have been lucky enough to travel the world for professional reasons, but there is nowhere that I'm happier than Croatia.*

The interview with Barbara Jones

M. S.-F. In your rich professional career you held also a number of positions and activities in professional associations. Special fields of interest are listed as well. Which one would you describe as your favourite and why?

***B.J.** My favorite professional issue has always been freedom of expression. This began when I was a teenager and the local public library wouldn't let me check out books in the adult section. My mother went down to the library and told them that they should allow me to read whatever I wanted! My husband and I raised our son the same way.*

Also, once I had a high school teacher, substituting for our teacher while he was in the hospital. She told us that he was a traitor and that he was teaching politics that were lies. My friends and I, who were very fond of our teacher, defended him by researching newspapers at the local public library, and confronting the teacher about her unethical behavior. This got us into a lot of trouble at first, but eventually when we were able to prove our case with facts, the school found another substitute teacher. When our teacher got out of the hospital, he thanked the class with tears in his eyes.

I always vowed that I would do whatever I could to defend the freedom of speech. There are many things about the U.S. that are problematic, but I am proud of our constitutional First Amendment freedoms and our right to disagree with our government. With that comes the obligation to be responsible, engaged citizens, and I try to do that, too.

M. S.-F. You've been an active member of the American Library Association a long time. ALA has developed strong policies on freedom of access to information issues. Could you explain to the readers of the Croatian Newsletter why intellectual freedom issues are at the top of concerns of the American librarianship?

***B.J.** Intellectual freedom needs to be a priority for ALA because these freedoms are always being challenged. While many countries have fewer freedoms than the U.S., we don't want to lose ours! The USA PATRIOT Act and other legislation is constantly threatening our First Amendment freedoms. While all U.S. librarians deplore the terrorist acts upon the U.S., and want very much to defend our country, many of us think that the government could defend us better with a different approach and not threaten our privacy and other personal freedoms. The American Library Association devotes a great deal of staff and energy to legislation and court cases, and to librarians whose jobs are threatened when they defend freedom of expression in their libraries.*

Librarians can't do their job without the right to provide a wide range of information to

patrons. We need to provide a variety of points of view, even those we disagree with. Otherwise, we aren't doing our job. One of my colleagues used to say that the test of a good library collection is if she disagrees with 50% of what is on the shelves.

Intellectual freedom issues have broadened over the years, as we have more and more patrons affected by poverty, disease, disabilities, and immigration difficulties. We need to provide information to all, especially to those people who need it the most and have the least amount of money to pay for it. We also need to do our best to protect the privacy of patrons. They should feel secure that whatever they read in the library or check out of the library is their personal business.

M. S.-F. In your book *Libraries, Access and Intellectual Freedom* you say that most of the intellectual freedom problems arise when the theory is to be applied in practice. What would you recommend to librarians when faced with those problems and how do you see the role of written library policies?

B.J. You must have written policies. The hardest thing is to take grand theories and apply them to real-world situations. Policies should have a reason for existing. What problem are you trying to solve with your policy? And, they need to be understood by the entire staff. For example, in the Wesleyan Libraries, a faculty member can't go up to the Circulation Desk and ask who has checked out a particular book. This confidential transaction is protected by state privacy laws (except in some cases, like the PATRIOT Act). An inexperienced circulation desk employee might be intimidated by a faculty member and get that information. We need to make sure that this employee has a written policy to show the faculty member. This also ensures that all library patrons are being treated equitably.

Written policies also help you keep calm. If a law enforcement officer comes to the desk and asks to see what book Student X has checked out, we need to stay calm and ask the officer a series of questions. This is easier to do if they are written down!

M. S.-F. At the Zagreb meeting in December 2006, you talked about privacy in the digital environment. In what manner has the digital environment, most notably Internet, created more urgency and focus on the privacy of users in libraries?

B.J. The Internet has made it much easier to do wiretapping and other types of surveillance. The ability to monitor transactions might help catch terrorists, but it could also promote identity theft—for example, stealing someone's social security or credit card number. On the other hand, the Internet can be a great democratizing element. It makes it easy for information to be disseminated for all the right reasons—to promote AIDS public health information, to tell people where to vote, etc. We need to be sure that the Internet isn't abused.

M. S.-F. You mentioned some incidents where the privacy of users was invaded either by librarians or other patrons. What is response to these situations? What is RFID?

B.J. RFID is a technology utilizing a coded label, that can be stuck on a box, that makes it possible to track such cargo like a TV from its manufacture, to the truck, to the store, to your home. It is a great inventory tracking device. However, it has the potential to be abused. Many libraries are using RFID technology to stick labels on books so that they can be checked out easily. However, if this technology is misused, it might be possible to trace books to your home, which is an invasion of privacy. There are ways to use this technology properly, but librarians need to be alert to any new uses of technology in

libraries, to make sure that patron privacy is protected.

I have spoken above about the invasion of privacy that is possible when librarians can find out who has checked out what book. That is prohibited in the U.S., under most circumstances.

M. S.-F. The concept of privacy and freedom of access to information are likely two opposed concepts. However, they have to be equally treated by librarians. Regarding this issue, can you tell us what impact has the U.S. Patriot Act on libraries and how do the American librarians fight against its restrictions on privacy of users ?

B.J. *Yes, the right to privacy has to be balanced against the right to know. These two principles often come into conflict. A good example is genealogy (family history). Someone might want to trace family history, but that personal information in the census records might be protected by privacy laws. The USA PATRIOT Act makes it possible for law enforcement to obtain library circulation and other records without first obtaining a court-ordered subpoena. They need only go to a secret court and obtain a National Security Letter to present to the librarian. The librarian can't tell the person whose records are under surveillance. The American Library Association is fighting to revise this law so that library records can remain private transactions. Librarians are faced with this dilemma.*

M. S.-F. You're also a member of the IFLA/FAIFE. Could you tell us what does this membership mean to you ? can you compare the way the IFLA/FAIFE deal with intellectual freedom issues with that of the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom or ALA/IRRT ? Do you find more differences or similarities?

B.J. *Membership in IFLA/FAIFE has opened a whole new world to me. For example, I have discovered that many of my colleagues from other cultures have very different values when it comes to censorship. For example, Americans tend to be very open about political debate, but very embarrassed by nudity. We tend to be very open in our criticism of religion if we want to be, but many of my colleagues feel this kind of behavior is blasphemy. These are important differences and we need to find common ground and build bridges when we are discussing freedom of expression policies in our libraries.*

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom has been in business for a very long time. It has a very large book of policies and procedures, called the Intellectual Freedom Manual. I am a very big supporter of written policies. I would like to see FAIFE be more structured. However, there are very different opinions about this, and I respect my colleagues' reasoning. FAIFE is not ALA, and should not be. Our more unstructured atmosphere often creates a great forum for discussions, for example.

Having said that, I just love working with my colleagues on FAIFE. I admire the courage many of them have displayed in their own countries, when confronted with war, authoritarian governments, and situations much more dire than my own. I often wonder if I would have that same courage.

M. S.-F. In the end, you participated at the Zagreb Workshop on anti corruption as one of the panelists. What is your opinion on the discussions about the role of libraries in fight against corruption? What is your general opinion on the Zagreb meeting?

B.J. *I came back from Zagreb just full of ideas! I loved meeting the Transparency*

International people. And the lectures from colleagues around the world were just amazing. Each lecture could have generated a whole day's discussion! I will work hard with my FAIFE colleagues to make sure that we continue examining these questions. I am hoping to come back to Croatia very soon. I really enjoyed my Croatian colleagues and they made me feel so very welcome! I think we need to do a lot of work to show librarians the examples of how we can fight corruption. In the U.S., we don't talk about this very much, and we should. We're not the most corrupt country in the world, but we're not the best either, so we have some work to do!

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