**To: Barbara Macikas, PLA Board**

**From: Carolyn Anthony**

**Re: MetLib Section of IFLA**

**Date: June 3, 2019**

I am currently serving a four-year term that began in 2017 as a member of the Standing Committee of the Metropolitan Libraries Section of IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations). You may have known this group in its earlier form as INTAMEL (International Association of Metropolitan Libraries). So far, I have attended three annual conferences of MetLib in Toronto, Belgrade, and Helsinki. The Toronto conference had a theme of partnership and Susan Benton and I co-presented on the Library Card Partnership Program which both ALA and ULC sponsored, together with IMLS and representatives of the Obama Administration. The Library Card Program was a wonderful example of a partnership that worked on the local and national level to spur a significant increase in the number of students holding a valid public library card. Each conference runs 4.5 days and includes professional presentations in the morning and library tours in the afternoon. One afternoon, there is generally a cultural tour. In Belgrade, it was interesting to see a number of Roman ruins, including in the basement of the Central Library of Belgrade.

In early May of this year, MetLib met in Helsinki with a conference theme of Reshaping Lives and Libraries, looking at issues like changes in the working culture, digitalization, and innovative partnerships. The conference combined the MetLib meeting with the ReShape Conference which has been held for several years (similar to the Next Conference) and helped to determine the program for the new Oodi Central Library in which this year’s conference was held. Oodi opened in December 2018 to considerable acclaim. It is not only a striking architectural achievement, but an extremely well-used and popular space. The point was made that Oodi is a Central Library and not the Main Library for the Helsinki Library System. The difference is that the Main Library has archives, a large collection of print materials, and many features one would expect in the main library of a municipal system. Oodi, on the other hand, was planned as a community learning center and one of the key projects of Finland’s 100th Anniversary of independence from Russia, observed in 2017. It is Central to the City and sits on one side of a City plaza that also features the Parliament Building, a music hall, and a modern art museum. Interestingly, money was put up by the City and national government to build the spectacular building, but the Library was informed that it would need to staff the building with existing staff from the Library System. Most of the staff volunteered to work at Oodi, knowing the challenges (and rewards) involved. Fifty-eight staff run the Library from 8 am – 10 pm M – F and from 10 am – 8 pm Sat – Sun. This does not include security or maintenance, but all public service staff. Selection and cataloging of items are accomplished elsewhere.

The main floor of the Oodi Library has the Helsinki Visitor Information Center, an EU Information Center, a planning agency for Helsinki, a café, a movie theatre and a public performance hall. There is a small selection of popular new books and book return slots, with check-in and sorting handled by RFID. The second floor is about activity, learning, and community. There is a maker space, a learning kitchen, video game rooms, virtual reality headsets and a bank of public computers. There are several music rooms and studios, facilitating all aspects of music-making from rehearsal to recording. There is also a glassed-in reading room (most every space occupied and all reading on tablets, laptops, and smart phones when I looked in). The third floor is referred to as Book Heaven, with a collection of 110,000 books in 20 languages. (Collections float throughout the system.) It is interesting that Finnish, Swedish and English books are interfiled in the main collection and signage is in all three languages. Spanish, French and other language books are on separately designated shelving. There is another café on this floor and multiple lounge areas defined by an area carpet and a grouping of comfortable furniture. The vast space is not divided into rooms, but flows from one end to the other, with Children’s World at one end. There is a small story room and a program room for children at that end of the floor. The exterior walls of the third floor are all glass, affording excellent views of the City.

The brochure about the new Library states that “Central Library Oodi contributes to the realization of Finnish society’s most important values, such as freedom of speech, education, equality and openness.” It also states that “Oodi was made together. We listened to and involved residents in the building’s design. We collected hundreds of dream library ideas from future customers of Oodi. The library’s name was also chosen through an open naming competition.” Signs in the building do not state rules of use such as the wearing of shoes and polite cell phone use, but rather

**Oodi is for all of us.** **Equality:** Everyone has the right to be in Oodi. Hanging out at Oodi without a reason is allowed and even recommended. We do not tolerate racism or discrimination. **Respect:** Treat others with respect. **Comfort:** Oodi is our shared living room. We are all responsible for keeping it comfortable. **Promise:**  Our personnel are here for you. We are in charge of safety at Oodi.

This sign, even more than the current technology, reflects the radical modernism of this new facility. For photos, see the website <https://www.oodihelsinki.fi> (in English as well as Finnish).

We also visited two of the branch libraries. One was on the third or fourth floor of a vertical shopping center building, with the library open to the rest of the floor and surrounded by a health clinic, a mental health clinic, a financial counseling center, and a maternal/child clinic. The latter was adjacent to the children’s area. There were defined, enclosed spaces for the teen center, maker space, and children’s programs. The other branch we visited was a community center, open without staff during certain hours when adults could swipe their library card to gain access as we might swipe a bank card to enter an ATM lobby.

As with any conference, the connections with people stand out over even the most interesting programming. Attendance at MetLib varies with the location. The conference in Helsinki attracted not only a large number of Scandanavians, but also librarians from the Baltic countries, for example, for whom travel to Helsinki was easy and accomplished in some cases by a ferry. Others come from elsewhere in Europe and fewer from Asia as well as North America. There were a couple of Africans.

There is always a business meeting at MetLib. Ongoing projects of MetLib are annual statistics gathering, a Library of the Year competition for new buildings, a showing and competition of films made by metropolitan libraries about some aspect of library service for the public, and a sister library project. There has been discussion about whether the MetLib Section should continue, in addition to the Public Libraries Section, and all present feel that it should because of the unique issues faced by metropolitan libraries. The MetLib program at IFLA last summer in Kuala Lumpur, for example, was on public libraries as refuge, and it featured several fascinating presentations from different continents about libraries being a welcoming place in the midst of discrimination, drug use in libraries, disaster recovery, and other such topics.

This year, for IFLA in Athens, the MetLib program will focus on Outcome Measures, covering methods for assessing outcomes, and use of the data for internal management and external advocacy. Emily Plagman from PLA will be one of the speakers, talking about the ways in which Project Outcome is now international. Another speaker will talk about the development of the Community Impact Measurement System for the Gates Global Libraries Program. Three other speakers from Australia, the Netherlands, and Spain will also present.

I have found in IFLA that we have much more in common than we have differences if you look at the concerns of librarians and the development and change issues with which libraries are dealing. There is innovation occurring in countries in Africa and Southeast Asia as well as in Western Europe and Australia that are more often featured in library publications available to us in the U.S. All of the international librarians use the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations as a touchstone for library planning. There are seventeen goals which were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, providing a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. The SDG’s as they are called constitute an agenda for 2030 and deal with topics such as ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, addressing climate change, and spurring economic growth. We hear nothing about those here, but they are well worth a look and are definitely relevant for our country. See <https://.sustainabledevelopment.un.org>