

EXPERIENCE REPORT

Ingrid Parent

Ingrid Parent, former Assistant Deputy Minister for the Documentary Heritage Collection sector, Library and Archives Canada, was a member of the ISSN Governing Board from 1990 to 1999 and served as its Chair from 1994 to 1996. Since 2009, Ingrid Parent has been the University Librarian at the University of British Columbia in Canada. Dr. Parent is recognized nationally and internationally for her outstanding contributions to libraries and to the library profession. She has been actively involved in the governance of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) for the past 14 years. Dr. Parent completed her two year term as president of the Federation in August 2013. Within IFLA, Dr. Parent has been a strong proponent of equitable access to information and promoting the diversity of voices in the world of information. In 2009, she was the winner of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) award for Distinguished Service to Research Librarianship, and in 2011, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Ottawa.

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In 1990 I became the Acting Director of the Cataloguing Branch at the National Library of Canada (NLC). NLC was an active early member of the ISSN international program, Canada having acceded to the ISSN Statutes under the auspices of Unesco in the 1970's. In that capacity I started to represent Canada on the ISSN Governing Board. NLC was very interested in international standards work, and had already gained a significant reputation as a leader in this area. I only continued that leadership tradition, and with the support of NLC, I became the Vice Chair and then the Chair of the Board. I was privileged to have played this role and I will always remember the many committed and passionate colleagues from around the world that I had the honour to meet and to work collaboratively with in order to plan the future directions of ISSN. I was also very fortunate to have had the guidance of two very intelligent, proactive Directors of the International ISSN Centre: Mme Suzanne Santiago and Mme Francoise Pellé. The ISSN program would not be the global success it has become without the total commitment and direction provided by these remarkable Directors.

In the 1990's there was much change taking place on many fronts. First of all was the challenge and impact of evolving technology. ISSN began with paper and typewriters and even handwritten worksheets. These worksheets were mailed from the national centres to the ISSN IC in Paris. In the 1980's, manual processes shifted towards more electronic means, including the production and shipping of reel to reel tapes, followed by CDROMs, and then transitioning to software like Osiris installed in many national centres. Not only did IC staff need to quickly become au courant and conversant with the latest technologies, they also had to rely on advice and expertise from not only Board members but also from external contractors who provided technical assistance.

Another area of rapid development was in the membership. With geopolitical changes taking place at increasing speed, the ISSN network had to deal with integrating new members from emerging nations as well as being mindful of political sensibilities. The dissolution of the Soviet Union as well as of the former Yugoslavia meant that many new national ISSN centres had to be created, trained and supported. The workload increased for the IC staff, but it was soon clear that all the new members brought energy, enthusiasm and expertise to the ISSN network. They are now some of the most active members in the system.

One of the most challenging issues that I encountered in my time on the ISSN Board was finding the right funding formula that provided the ISSN IC with the financial resources needed to efficiently run the Centre and at the same a formula that was fair and equitable to all participating countries. When I first got involved with the International Centre I saw that the countries that were providing the most serial bibliographic records to the Centre were paying the highest membership fees. Canada was included in this group. And the costs were steeply rising every year, so much so that there was concern that some of the most prolific national centres would pull out of the international program. The reason for this situation was that the formula for determining the annual national membership fee was based on a combination of a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the number of serial bibliographic records submitted to the IC. The more serial titles a national agency submitted to the IC, the higher the annual fees it had to pay. This funding formula made sense at the beginning of the ISSN program when all worksheets were mailed to Paris, and the IC staff entered all the data into the central ISSN database. However in the 1980's and 1990's, the major national centres were sending tapes or CDROMs to Paris which were then more or less automatically loaded into the central registry. The work required to be done at the IC was only a fraction of what the previous manual system had entailed.

Therefore, if the formula for charging annual member fees was to be adjusted to be more equitable and fair in relation to putting more weight on the GDP side of the calculation as opposed to the number of bibliographic records created, then the fees to be paid by some countries would need to rise quite substantially while other countries saw a decrease in their fees. To pay more for receiving the same services in any kind of situation is always difficult to accept. After several analyses of the data and intense discussions by the Board and the membership, we succeeded in developing a new formula for determining member fees which encouraged the increasing submissions of serial records to the central registry but did not penalize the most productive national centres. I was very impressed by the generosity displayed by those countries that saw significant fee increases, especially Germany and Japan. This example is one of many where the members from all over the world, from countries with different political ideologies, languages and cultures, can effectively work together in an equitable way to advance the collective cause of providing seamless and free access to serial publications in all formats that will benefit all members of society.

And that collaboration is the greatest achievement of the ISSN program, still going strong after 40 years.

Vive le programme ISSN!

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