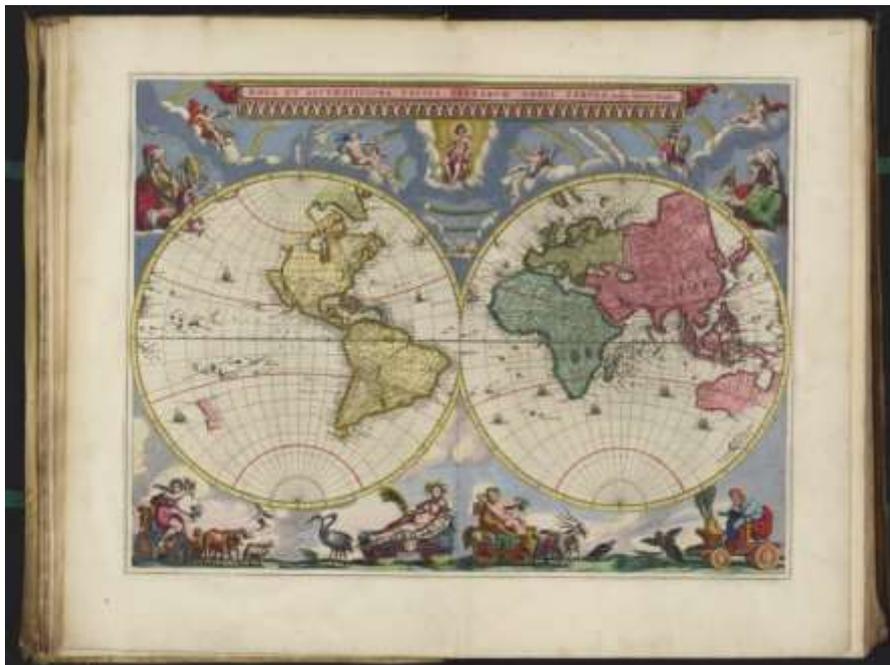




## GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

# Report of the Rare Books and Special Collections Section meeting How a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future – Ideas for actions

4 June – 14 June 2018



[Map of the world](#) from Joan Blaeu, *Atlas major*, volume 1 (Amsterdam: Joan Blaeu, 1665), by permission of the National Library of Scotland.

## Contributors

This report is created by:

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Frédéric Blin

Claudia Bubenik

Adelaida Caro Martin

Fabiano Cataldo

Danielle Culpepper

Maria Ermakova

Daryl Green

Hege Høsøien

Naima Keddane

Beth Kilmarx

Rémi Mathis

Meg Phillips

Krister Ostlund

Mohamed Soliman

Tan Huism

Anthony Tedeschi

Marijana Tomic

Helen Vincent

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## Introduction

On 4 June – 14 June, by email and online, 18 members from the Rare Books and Special Collections Standing Committee participated in a conversation about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. Together all participants represent 266 years of library experience.

We built on the results from phase 1 of the conversation to gather ideas for actions for IFLA that help a united field tackle the challenges of the future. This is our contribution to **the largest ideas store of actions**.

Participants were all members of the Rare Books and Special Collections Standing Committee. Helen Vincent and Danielle Culpepper, the Section Officers, had attended the March workshop in Barcelona and had reported back to the Committee about the Global Vision at the time of that workshop. We included the Global Vision as an item at our Mid-Term business meeting at the National Library of Oslo in April, at which there was a review of the challenges and opportunities of the Global Vision and a preliminary discussion about how it could connect with the Section’s priorities and activities going forwards. So this was a group who came into the discussion already informed and already having had the opportunity to reflect on the Global Vision.

We began by a general email exchange during the week of **June 4-8** in which participants voted for the top priorities and shared their thoughts about why they had chosen them. Our choice of priorities having been identified, we then used a survey to collect the first thoughts on ideas for action, and finally at an online conference call on June 14 we took this list of ideas and decided which ones to develop. Some members participated in all three stages of this discussion, and some in only one or two, but all contributed valuably to the process.

## About the participants

The participants in the workshop are divided by experience in the field in the following way:

Years of experience in libraries	Number of participants
1-10 years of experience	2
11-20 years of experience	14
21-30 years of experience	2
31+ years of experience	0

Each participant shared in which type of library they have most experience:

Years of experience in libraries	Number of participants
National Libraries	8

Academic and Research Libraries	4
Public Libraries	0
School Libraries	0
Special Libraries	0
Other Types of Libraries	1
Not a librarian	5

## Opportunities for the Professional Unit or Committee

In phase 1 of IFLA’s global vision discussion, ten opportunities have been discovered for the library field. Given the work and expertise of our Professional Unit or Committee, the following opportunities are most relevant to us:

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### [LIST THE TOP-3 OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED. INCLUDE THE OPPORTUNITY NUMBER]

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| • 9 | We need to maximise access to the world’s documentary heritage              |
| • 3 | We need to understand community needs better and design services for impact |
| • 4 | We must keep up with ongoing technological changes                          |

### Comments:

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Our group agreed that with our members’ professional and institutional role as stewards of cultural heritage collections and objects in mind, we did not need to debate the fact that the role of libraries as guardians of the memory of the world (Highlight 9) is central to what we do. Therefore the proposal that we select Opportunity 9 without the need for detailed discussion was accepted.

A very strong fourth-place candidate for our top opportunities, with nearly as many votes as some of the others, was Opportunity 6, ‘We need to ensure stakeholders understand our value and impact’. Participants expressed clearly the need for stronger advocacy not just for libraries in general but for the value of our rare and special collections, for the impact professionals with specialist expertise in these collections can make in preserving and making them accessible, and for the benefit of having the proper standards and best practice applied at every stage of their life cycle and in doing the work that connects them to people. The experience of participants was that in general, professionals in our

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area have a strong practical need to make the case to stakeholders for our collections, and what we do, in such a way as to persuade them to provide adequate resources for our work. This seems a more urgent goal for participants than wider advocacy which does not directly lead to better resources.

In compiling our ideas for actions, we have included some big ambitions but also identified where we see developing our existing activities as the best way for us to work towards achieving the aspirations of the Global Vision.

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## Ideas for action

To realise the opportunities identified in the first phase of the Global Vision discussion, we focused on creating ideas for actions. These ideas will be entered into the ideas store for action of IFLA. Our recommended actions for each of the top-3 opportunities and the specially highlighted opportunities 5 (advocacy) and 7 (collaboration) are:

### **Ideas for action for opportunity 9: We need to maximise access to the world's documentary heritage**

The top-5 ideas for action our Professional Unit/Committee could consider to realise the opportunity:

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1. Uncovering the world's hidden collections – not everything is findable online; cataloguing and other forms of disclosure can be hard to get funding for, but there is no one solution to this and it has to be worked out by sectors and regions. Following the launch of a cultural heritage advocacy toolkit (see under 5, Advocacy, suggestion 1) IFLA should run a campaign on why uncovering the world's hidden collections matters, encouraging librarians to use the toolkit to run their own campaigns and to uncover their collections. Can IFLA use the cultural heritage argument to unlock global funding for online description and resource discovery where it is impossible to achieve this locally? For instance what collections will never be included in the UNESCO Memory of the World because no-one knows they are there?

2. Identify the gaps in digital access to cultural heritage – who has access, how they have it, and what content is provided – this relates to an idea for action discussed at the Global Vision meeting in Barcelona. It was proposed to kickstart this process by gathering together the world's aggregators of digital content and data archivists to carry out a gap analysis and begin to develop a global action plan

3. Selection to preserve our documentary heritage: what libraries collect today will form tomorrow's rare and special collections of documentary heritage materials. We should provide guidance (in

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collaboration with IFLA sections responsible for contemporary collecting?) on collecting for the future and on selection of content in all formats for long-term preservation

4. Our SC should always encourage the sharing of information about collections in an accessible format to as wide an audience as possible, providing examples of good practice, collaboration and effective workflows. We should provide spaces in our activities for the continuing dialogue between ‘more product less process’ and the need for quality description to a high standard. In particular we will include these elements in our Competencies for Rare Book and Special Collections Librarians and provide models and best practice for inclusivity and removing barriers to access

5. Different libraries are at very different places in their journeys towards maximising access to heritage. In our activities we must balance providing guidance with the basics for those who need them, collating and sharing good examples of best practice, and encouraging and promoting experimentation and innovation. We need to review our programmes of activities annually to make sure that they balance these strands to meet the needs of those who look to us for advice and support.

#### Comments:

Our Committee is strongly committed to the idea of libraries as guardians of the memory of the world, as repositories of documentary heritage in its widest sense, and of cultural heritage in particular. We note that while ‘documentary heritage’ is a UNESCO concept, and ‘cultural heritage’ is familiar IFLA vocabulary, internationally there is not universal understanding of these concepts and they do not translate equally clearly into all languages so there is work to be done on this. In our discussions everyone agreed about the importance of not just preserving this heritage but also of recording it so that people know it exists and can find it, and making it available – IFLA should champion these things equally. We discussed what is meant by ‘access’ and by ‘access for all’, and the different concepts of inclusivity, equality of access, and free access, and barriers to achieving these, in different kinds of libraries and in different countries. Is there an agreed IFLA vision of what maximum access would look like? Should there/could there be?

### **Ideas for action for opportunity 3: We need to understand community needs better and design services for impact**

The top-5 ideas for action our Professional Unit/Committee could consider to realise the opportunity:

1. Work with other IFLA Sections to collect information about the trends in how different user communities access cultural heritage materials and collections and what they do with them, for instance the use of data mining of digitised collections. Publish this as a guide for those who provide

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access, and review every five years. This could be done through a survey asking libraries to provide information about how people use their collections – but could IFLA support a properly scientific investigation that goes beyond a voluntary survey?

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2. Build a focus on users and user services into our programme of work – start with making this a topic for discussion/seminars/Congress panels and commissioning blogs about it, evolve ideas to a position paper and suggestions for future actions – are guidelines or other publications required about how to collect information about user needs and how to design services to meet those needs, or is the requirement a more informal sharing of best practice and new ideas? What is the balance between promoting new ways of opening up access and sharing how to improve existing ways? How to get beyond case studies to form more general principles and positions?

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3. Collaborate with our peers in other parts of the GLAM sector on a ‘catalogue’ of known community and user needs to access cultural heritage i.e. documenting the kinds of access, the reasons why people want to access, and the barriers to access. This could serve as a reference point for those developing services and thinking about how to connect their collections with the communities who should/could use them.

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4. Use our Competencies for Special Collections Librarians to promote the role of the Special Collections Librarian in interpreting/making accessible/communicating collections to audiences – frame it to make clear that we are providers, not gatekeepers.

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5. An incentive to provide access is to show how valuable it is - collect examples of assessing/capturing/evaluating the impact of access to cultural heritage on those who use them, and publish these.

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Comments:

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As one participant commented: ‘This should be a key role for every librarian but has sometimes been forgotten when we work with very valuable collections, with librarians that have sometimes been rather guards than providers’. We also discussed the wide range of possible communities and ways of providing access to them – those who work with rare books and special collections need to think about providing access in every way from traditional exhibitions and reading room services to connecting with schools, children and community groups to the constantly-changing technical and technological requirements to enable researchers to download, harvest, ingest, data-mine, visualise and re-use our data and metadata.

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## Ideas for action for opportunity 4: We must keep up with ongoing technological changes

The top-5 ideas for action our Professional Unit/Committee could consider to realise the opportunity:

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1. Digital – not just digitisation – has become ‘the new normal’ for special collections, as the material in our care increasingly becomes the substance used or exploited by new digital resources and projects. We should ensure that this is reflected in our Competencies for Special Collections Librarians and continue to use our events as a way of bringing new developments to the attention of our community.

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2. Improve our communication about the technological and digital innovations that are presented at our events – particularly recording and sharing presentations not included in the IFLA Library, e.g. those presented at mid-term meetings or local events.

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3. Provide paths to training or advice, not just lists of available resources – prioritise guidance for using tech to help with imperilled cultural heritage materials and for those working in small institutions and/or with minimal budgets.

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4. Work with the PAC programme to promote description for preservation purposes and with IFLA HQ to promote digital preservation to our members, and in particular to highlight how technological changes can improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which librarians can do these things.

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5. Part of ‘digital is the new normal’ is the high level of knowledge and competence many professionals in our sector have in this area and their interest in developing their knowledge and skills further. We need to promote this aspect of rare book librarianship to erase the perception that ‘working with old books’ is as old-fashioned as the books themselves and to show how tech-adept and ready our members are. One specific action for this is to develop our SC liaison with the new DH/DS sig and other relevant IFLA units.

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Comments:

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The commentary on this challenge states: ‘Ensuring all libraries have the right tools, infrastructure, funding and skills to seize the opportunities provided by digital innovations is a pressing need.’

The problem is clear – not everyone who needs to have these things works in an institution which can resource them. We had a lively discussion about what the role of the Standing Committee should be and can be in terms of providing training, identifying funding opportunities etc. What is the role of local associations and of specialist groups within our sector? We agreed that our role is primarily to collate and disseminate information, not to overcommit to providing training or support directly ourselves.

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## Ideas for action for opportunity 5: advocacy

Five bold actions our Professional Unit /Committee could undertake to advocate for libraries:

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1. We should advocate for our institutions as not just ‘treasure rooms’ but cultural memory institutions. In particular we propose that IFLA should collaborate with our GLAM sector allies on a campaign about cultural heritage as a right, drawing on and relating to the UN statements and campaigns about the right to cultural heritage.

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2. Develop an advocacy toolkit for cultural heritage collections – libraries and librarians need to show why our collections matter, why this material matters wherever it is held, and why the work we do in our own institutions and collaboratively to preserve, describe and make it available, and to connect it with those who would/could/should use it matters. This should include the need to collect and select for the future.

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3. Work with IFLA HQ staff in engaging and collaborating with other cultural heritage sectors – as the library sector in general focuses on information and content regardless of carrier (and rightly so), those of us who are still responsible for preserving, documenting and providing access to the actual objects which are part of the world’s tangible cultural heritage need to ensure that our kind of cultural heritage is on a parity with other kinds and not a poor relation of the kind found in museums.

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4. Engage in action with others involved in protecting cultural heritage – in particular build on the current preliminary dialogues to set up a formal liaison with the international book trade on matters of mutual interest such as theft and illegal trafficking in cultural objects

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Comments:

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In our first review of priorities, it was clear that to those involved in the discussion Opportunity 6 ‘we need to ensure stakeholders understand our value and impact’ was a more urgent priority than general advocacy. Without proving our worth to stakeholders, we will not get the funding that we need to enable us to develop the projects that will, ultimately, open up access to our collections and therefore to cultural heritage for wider and deeper audiences. People are more prepared to make positive noises about the value of culture than they are actually to deliver the funding that we need.

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## Ideas for action for opportunity 7: collaboration

Five bold actions could your Professional Unit/Committee undertake to improve collaboration within IFLA and with external people and partners:

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1. Review existing collaborative relationships – are there any which should be formalised? Work out how to develop regular dialogue with our peers in ICOM/ICA

2. Foster regional and inter-regional collaboration to increase access to best practice, building on the model of the RBSC section’s involvement with regional activities in South America

3. Relating to our ideas for opportunity 9 above, encourage collaboration to disclose ‘the world’s hidden collections’ – provide a platform in our blog for those who want to seek collaboration and develop networks, and collect and share examples of good practice

4. Encourage our IFLA colleagues to pull those who work with rare books and special collections in areas under-represented in our Section into engagement with us – we are aware that our Section has a predominance of European and North American members but we do not always have the contacts ourselves to make connections.

5. Rare books and special collections are cultural heritage objects, not purely to be seen as information carriers – therefore when appropriate we should collaborate with our GLAM sector peers and not simply follow general library sector practices, for instance in the ongoing work of developing compatible standards for description of rare materials deriving from our compatible descriptive reference models (LRM/CIDOC-CRM/Records in Context)

Comments:

We discussed how far the Standing Committee can of itself develop collaborations and how far it can be an agent through which our members, or the wider community, can find and be connected with networks and collaborators. It cannot be our primary role to take responsibility for connecting individual libraries, projects etc, but we can provide a way for them to make these connections through our events and communications networks.

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## A global conversation

This report is created in an interactive process on 16/07/18. It is part of a global conversation initiated by IFLA on how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future, currently in phase 2.

Over the course of two years (2017-2018), IFLA will involve as many librarians and others as possible in this global conversation. Participants are encouraged to continue the conversation in their own networks and organization and share the results with IFLA. In the beginning of 2019, the results of all the workshops and

online discussions will be presented to IFLA's GB, which in turn will use the ideas for actions to create concrete strategies, processes and work programmes for the future.

To learn more about the global conversation, and download supporting materials to support your own activities, visit <https://www.ifla.org/globalvision>.

Stay tuned for news about the IFLA Global Vision discussion following [#iflaGlobalVision](#) and make sure to cast your vote in August when the online voting platform is available on <https://www.ifla.org/globalvision>.