

Interview with Vadim Duda, President of the Russian Library Association.

Svetlana Gorokhova (SG)

Dear friends, today we have a very special guest, leader of the Russian library community, President of the Russian Library Association, President of the Library Assembly of Eurasia, but most of all, he is a great outstanding Director General of the Russian State Library, National Library of Russia. Please welcome Vadim Duda.

Vadim Valerievich, thank you very much that you found the time and opportunity to join us today for this series of podcasts of the IFLA CPDWL section. Thank you. We would like to ask you several traditional questions.

So, the first question would be, if you had to describe yourself using only one word, what would this word be, please?

Vadim Duda (VD)

It would be passion.

SG

Passion? Passion for? Everything?

VD

Passion for.... Just passion.

SG

Thank you very much. It's a very nice word. I think it describes you a lot. I agree. The second question is what compelled you to become a librarian? How did you get started?

VD

Yes, I think it all started in the childhood. I grew up in a family where the book was the most valuable piece in the tangible world. So I think that was the start of my career. But definitely, it's not only education, it's not only the employers of my life, but mostly the people and the books, that made me to become a librarian.

Actually, my very first job was a librarian. It was in 1984. So I got a job of, you know, the entry-level job in the library of the Moscow Aviation Institute. And that was very important page of my life.

So finally, here I go again. I'm sitting in the Russian State Library as Director General, which is a great privilege and great honor for me.

SG

Oh, wonderful. It sounds like a very good career you made in the library business as well, in the library industry.

VD

Yes it sounds great. Library business sounds quite strange for me, but anyway, yes.

SG

Why, it's still an industry. I mean, it's still a sphere of life that needs to be organized. And I think probably your technical engineering education also helped in that. Don't you think so? Your engineering education helped, yeah. That's wonderful, thank you. And what does global librarianship mean to you? How's that vision changed for you over the years?

VD

Well, let me use the same word, at least one of the words. For me, what does it mean for me? It's passion and devotion for our library business, as you said. And it's a passion and devotion for the books, for the knowledge, for the development of human capital. And that vision has never changed and will never change for me.

I think this is the core of the librarianship.

SG

But do you think that global librarianship changed? I mean, do you think the situation in general changed over the years? Is it still important, do you think, to share the knowledge at a global level?

VD

I think yes. We have to keep our contacts and keep sharing our vision, our strategy, our values, our new approaches for the development, simply because libraries, this is for the future, it's not for the present. We have to keep our values for the future generations.

And we have to set the very high level of communication because we need to show younger people that we are above the current situation. We have to think about the future, always.

SG

Thank you very much, I agree with you completely. And do you remember how did you first get involved with IFLA at all? What is your first interaction with IFLA?

VD

I think, well, let me try to recall, I would say that the most important contact with IFLA, it was in 2016. And if you remember, you and me, we happened to be in one of the IFLA WLICs, it was in the USA.

I think it was a disaster for the Russian delegation because we found ourselves in a group of seven, if I'm not mistaken, participants, not only from Russia, but also from CIS countries. But I think we changed it a lot right the next year because the next CIS caucus happened in Poland, and it was more than 70 participants.

And I think it was the very rewarding feeling that we did something very good in just one year. I think IFLA is a great opportunity to meet many, many, many different people with quite different point of views on many, many things. And that's the core of IFLA.

We respect each other, we respect each others opinion, and it's a good platform to learn, first of all.

SG

Well, exactly. Thank you very much. I share your opinion on that completely, but I also wanted to ask, but probably you already answered this question, what is the most memorable moment? Probably, you remember a session or a social event during IFLA meetings, I mean, or probably it would be one of the visits of IFLA presidents to Russia. What is most memorable thing for you in IFLA activities?

VD

No doubt, for me, it was Wroclaw, because it was the very first opportunity to address the large audience from the scene. It was the presentation of our model libraries approach. And by the way, it was back in 2017. And that time it was just the initiative of the Library of the Foreign Literature.

It was a very small initiative, but two years later it became national project with a quite serious federal financing to develop the network of municipal libraries all over the Russian Federation. So that is the most memorable moment for me if we are talking about IFLA WLICs.

SG

Thank you very much. I want to echo you on this statement because we're all very, very proud of how this model libraries project develops in the framework of the National Project

of Culture. As far as I know it is more than 1,200 libraries, right? And overall funding is more than 10 billion rubles already invested into that. And it's really an amazing initiative.

And of course, in many respects, we need to compliment you for that because you put a lot of energy, a lot of knowledge, insistent and consistent efforts to communicate not only with the public, to support the development, but also to our government, because the government is allocating these sums of money to develop the library system.

So thank you for that.

VD

I think it's not only about the rational aspect. This is a bit more. By the way, let me translate, it's something like 150 million of US dollars, which were invested in the development of the network of municipal libraries all over, again, Russian Federation, but I think it took not only the rational efforts to sell this idea to the government, it was a lot of passion, Svetlana, passion of all the librarians of our country.

If you remember how many times we just dreamed that, yes, we need the support, we need it. And finally, when we get this opportunity, we just grabbed it and did our best to transform it to something very good.

SG

Well, the results are really amazing. So congratulations on that. And more than that, it's also like the attitude of government and stakeholders has changed tremendously. Because when you see the results and when you communicate, when you see the libraries as solid partners in the national initiative, it's very, very rewarding. So thank you for that. Okay, thank you very much.

And our next question is, what are you most excited about in the profession? What excites you a lot?

VD

I think it's a transformation of one important thing - the relations with the government and high stakeholders of our profession has changed a lot simply because we learned how to say not "give us" but "here we go that's what we can offer you". So actually it's a great transformation and for me it's very rewarding we are not beggars anymore.

SG

Yes, now we are partners))) Lovely, thank you very much for this answer. But we also understand that it's absolutely impossible yet to be on top of any activities if you are not developing constantly professionally. So professional development is a key and I know you pay a lot of attention to be fit in this respect, not only physically but also mentally.

Can you share with us some tips for professional development you use, how to be able to comply, how to build it into the process of your very busy life?

VD

I think the essential part of the professional development, the career building (for me), is communication. I think you need to talk to people; you need to talk to those you would like to learn from. And I think this is the most important part. Find time, find opportunities, talk and learn from real people.

Of course, you can take the online course, online study, but it would never, never, never replace the offline interaction with the top of the industry. Just take my word, this is important.

SG

I agree. Do you think IFLA provides some space and opportunities for professional development from your point of view? And what would be your advice to IFLA newcomers?

VD

Actually, communication is exactly what's happening at IFLA congresses. You remember, Svetlana, you don't eat, you don't sleep, you communicate. And I think this is really the most important thing about IFLA. Like I said, the most important and essential part of career development is offline communication with those who change the vision and the landscape of the industry, when you talk to real changers.

SG

Wonderful, I agree. So your advice would be “go for IFLA”? “Go participate!”.

VD

My advice is very simple. Go wherever you can to learn, to study and to feel the future.

SG

Lovely, thank you very much. The next question is, if you didn't work in libraries, what profession other than librarianship would you have wanted to attempt?

VD

I would sell books in a small shop. Talking to my customers, having a cup of tea, discussing the book I read yesterday, I would definitely be one of the, you know, sellers in a small family style.

SG

Bookshop? Oh, I vote for it because what I want, I want to have a coffee shop next to your bookstore.

VD

No, I think you would have a bar and you would sell something else, but that would be complementary to my business.

SG

Well, this is something for you and me to consider for our pension plan. I go for it. Thank you very much. It sounds really exciting. I agree. Talking to people, share what you read, just sounds like a fairytale. Okay, and actually we're moving to the end, I know how busy you are, and so the next question is can you tell us about the project, presentation or program that you're working on and what we would like to zoom out and tell us about. What is on stake right now before you, what are you excited about in professional sphere?

VD

I do believe that the future is really exciting. And one of the most exciting things happening right now is the artificial intelligence development. And I would say it would change a lot in our profession. And one of the most ambitious projects of Leninka (Russian State Library), we are building our own neural network called AILA (Artificial Intelligence of Leninka Art).

So let me keep it in, I don't want to describe the project because it's very ambitious, of course, but I do believe we will build a real library of the future for the generations to come using artificial intelligence as a media to find books, movies, to convert music to text and to find the proper music or painting for your next book.

So it's a very daring project, but let me put the stop here as a teaser.

SG

All right, that sounds fantastic. It sounds also like a very beautiful female name, you know, Aila, Aila...

VD

Yes, it is a woman. I mean, we already made a kind of vision of Aila, and it's a beautiful girl, by the way, with glasses, of course.

SG

With glasses, of course. It's a sign of knowledge.

VD

It's a sign of the librarian, you know.

SG

Yes, that's true. We both wear glasses now so that's it. It's exciting. Thank you very much. It's really good. One more question. We just found out that the next World Library and Information Congress will be happening in Astana in Kazakhstan.

What is your vision of the Russian libraries' participation in this World Library and Information Congress? Because we didn't have congresses for some time. So what is the plan? Are we going to participate and in which form, do we know?

VD

Svetlana, how many words would you allow me to use for this question?

SG

As many as you want

VD

Okay, so I will be very, very short. We are looking forward to this conference and I'm sure that we will do our best to participate with a very nice delegation from Russia and from the CIS countries. So, probably, we will have a very nice caucus of CIS in Astana. Two main words: looking forward.

SG

Lovely. We are looking forward as well, because we miss interaction, as you say. Professional and human interaction, seeing our colleagues and sharing with them what we achieved all together. And the super final question. I know you are a great sportsman, and I don't know how you are managing, really. Like during your such a busy schedule to find time to run and to go to the gym and just look, go perfectly fit, so we're all looking at you with great admiration.

Give us a couple of advices, how to find time, what to do and why do you need it so much?

VD

First of all, the first advice is to marry a German girl. So, they know how to manage your schedule and how to make the motivation for you to be in a good fit. So, marry a German girl. As I did. Of course, it's a joke, but yes, the partner or wife, it's very important. I mean, this is the real motivation for you to go ahead.

The second thing is just manage your schedule. I put my gym to my working schedule. This is as important as usual business meetings. And please don't put it, you know, like somewhere below. I have to meet with my colleagues. This is more important than going to the gym or to run my favorite 10 kilometers.

No, I just put it as a high priority in my schedule. That's it. This is the only way.

SG

Lovely.

VD

There is no tomorrow. You have to fulfill your plans right now, today. Including gym.

SG

Alright. And you think it is important to be physically fit?

VD

Yes, I think so. It is very important because it gives you the energy, the power, the good feelings, ability to travel, ability to, you know, cope with a tough schedule. Yes, of course, you need it, sure.

SG

I know. I'm not so well organized, but I'm trying hard as well to follow you. You're a great motivator for all of us, really. Like, we are looking at your Telegram channel, Director of Leninka, which is a great thing. It's a good motivator. Every morning, actually, we see you putting forward very important information about the current day, but also your schedule, your sports achievements.

Vadim, thanks a lot and we really are very grateful on behalf of IFLA CPDWL section that you found this time. We wish you all the best, all the successes to Russian libraries and we do hope you will be able to join our program during World Library and Information Congress in Astana and be our special guest.

Thank you very much.

VD

Just remember one very simple thing **the future is in our hands.**

SG

Agree, 100 percent.