

Not an arrival point but the start for a passionate debate to be continued
- Italy coordinator's personal experiences on participating on project The World through Picture Books

Antonella Lamberti

It seems impossible but it's true: Italy didn't participate in the first edition of *The World through Picture Books*. I couldn't believe it when I found that out!

A few words to introduce myself: I'm an Italian children's librarian and I work for the Italian national children literature database *Liber*. I can also speak some foreign languages and I was recruited as a volunteer for the last IFLA conference in Lyon, where I had a great experience, from all points of view, human and professional.

It was just there that, while attending the Standing Committee meeting of Section Libraries for Children, I learnt about this inconceivable absence of Italy in the 1st edition of the catalogue of the project. So, once back home, I got in touch with AIB (Italian Librarians Association) to find a way to include Italy, but nobody could coordinate our country's participation. There was one solution left: I had to do it. At that point, I still hoped that I could get the permission of doing at least part of the work during my working time, but I was told that this coordination work for IFLA could become too demanding in terms of time, so my employer refused to assume this "risk". I could not step off, I didn't want to! And so I did everything alone and overtime – that is, at night or in the weekend, as I also have a second job to supplement my part-time job salary.

I rapidly checked the deadline for sending data, I wrote to my colleague librarians, asking a list of their favourite picture books (in an order from 1 to 10), respecting IFLA criteria. Thanks to the existing mailing list of AIB I could do it quickly. Yes, I might have chosen an easier way to proceed, choosing for instance a small group of librarians for the survey, maybe among the ones belonging to official associations, but I wanted to really involve colleagues from all over the country, the ones who work daily to promote reading and books among the children. I didn't want to propose a pre-selected range of titles, as I wished to respect the opinion of librarians. I knew I was risking not to have enough votes for a meaningful result, or to have too many to handle. But in about ten days – that was the time limit I had been given – over 50 answers arrived, selecting more than 100 books: it was good!

I spent the rest of my free time during the month counting votes, answering emails (I had decided to thank each participant with an individual email), writing reviews. I also wrote to some librarians in order to have their opinion when I had doubts – and I had several: for instance about the suitability of including "silent books" (without text), or about the proper reading age for some proposed books. I didn't want to decide alone and so I "asked librarians"! And librarians did answer to me, exactly as we are used to do: quickly, exhaustively and passionately.

When finally I figured out which were the first 10 titles, I started to contact the publishers, one by one, so that none of them could know who the others were. I asked them information materials about their chosen book, and a good quality image of the cover. This part of the job took longer than I had expected: some publishers didn't answer, some didn't send the requested materials quickly, some emails got lost in press offices... Some answered with enthusiasm and asked to know more about the publication. In one case I also had to look for the author in order to reach the publisher and in another one, I had to take care of the shipment of some books abroad (to Paris and to Tokyo for the exhibits), after having agreed to do so with IFLA, in the person of Mrs

Quiñones -by the way she was my angel, always ready to clarify doubts and to answer to my questions!

At the end of October everything was finally ready and could be sent to IFLA!

Now it's not possible to communicate the results before the new publication is out, but what is sure is that Italy is included in the next edition and that the 10 selected, different books form all together an interesting and varied window over Italian publishing for children. This survey has also represented a moment for some librarians to stop and think more deeply about books in their catalogues, remembering or discovering the splendid works we have among Italian children books.

And what I hope now is that this participation in this IFLA publication might be not only an arrival point but the start for a passionate debate to be continued.

Author:

Antonella Lamberti

Biblioteca Comunale, Sezione Ragazzi

Campi Bisenzio (Firenze)