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Freedom and Equity of Access to Information: the Policy Change of IFLA, 2003-2013

Introduction:

From 2003 to 2013, IFLA's (International Federation Library Association) policy progressed gradually towards the principles of freedom and equity of access to information, the so-called core values written in IFLA's Strategic Plan. This article intends to explain how the IFLA policy-makers have developed the two principles as IFLA's core values since 2006.

In the field of information and library science, research on policy change has been neglected. Most importantly, this article will introduce a powerful research approach into the information and library science, which is the perception approach and has its unique advantage in analysis of policy change in the field of political science. The perception approach sees the "real world" (operational environment), including both internal and external factors, as the independent variable and treats the decision-makers' perceptions of the operational environment as the intervening variable. In other words, the importance of internal and external factors is determined through how the policy-makers perceive them.

Without the intervening variable, the association between explanatory and response variables disappears. To explain a certain policy change (dependent variable), researchers who adopt the perception approach, thus, not only need to focus on explaining the independent variables, but also need to discover the association between the explanatory and intervening variables. The logic between both the "real world" and policy-makers' perception of the "real world" forms the fundamental framework in this article for explaining IFLA's policy change.

This article argues that the two core values, adopted by the IFLA policy-makers, are strongly influenced by the World Summit on the Information Society held by International Telecommunication Union in December 2003. Although the two important values were not written in the IFLA's policy direction in 2004, they were advocated by IFLA's President Kay Raseroka (2003-2005) and President elect Alex Byrne (2005-2007) in their presentation made in 2004. In 2006, the two core values, for the first time, were written in the IFLA's Strategic Plan. Since then, they have been repeatedly written in the IFLA's Strategic Plan as the core values playing the key role directing the IFLA's policy.

The perception approach:

Both Holsti and Castano emphasize the importance to the study of particular policy-maker's perceptions in terms of foreign policy behaviour. They argue as follows:

*“Foreign-policy-making may be viewed as a search for satisfactory alternatives from among the range of those perceived by leaders who choose for their respective nation-states. The Key concept in this approach is the perception, the process by which decision-makers detect and assign meaning to inputs from their environment and formulate their own purposes on intents.”*¹

(Ole R. Holsti et al., 1968)

*“In an international relations context, the mutual images held by actors affect their mutual expectations about the Other's behaviour and guide the interpretation of the Other's actions.”*²

(Emanuele Castano et al., 2003)

Regarding the explanation of foreign policy, understanding of political elite's images of the situation, for them, is more important than discovering the “reality” itself. Holsti stressed “in any case, the essential point is that the actor's response will be shaped by *his perception* of the stimulus and not necessarily by qualities objectively inherent in it.”³

In order to explain this approach, it helps first to define certain concepts. “Operational environment” includes all factors except policy-makers themselves. Sprout and Sprout used “milieu,” “physical environment,” “non-human environment,” etc. as an alternative to the term “operational environment,”⁴ but Boulding preferred the term “situation.”⁵ Based on the territorial boundaries of states, the operational environment is divided into two sub-environments, the external and internal environments.⁶ There are some other substitute terms for the external environment

¹ Ole R. Holsti, Robert C. North, and Richard A. Brody, “Perception and Action in the 1914 Crisis,” in J. David Singer edit. *Quantitative International Politics: Insights and Evidence*, New York: The Free Press, 1968, p128.

² Emanuele Castano, Simona Sacchi, and Peter Hays Gries, “The Perception of the Other in International Relations: Evidence for the Polarizing Effect of Entitativity.” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2003, p449.

³ Ole R. Holsti et. al., 1968, p129.

⁴ Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout, “Environmental Factors in the Study of International Politics,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1957, p311.

⁵ K. E. Boulding, “National Images and International Systems,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 3, No. 2, June 1959, pp120-21.

⁶ Michael Brecher, Blema Steinberg, and Janice Stein, “A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behavior,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 13, No. 1. March 1969, p82.

such as international factors/environment and external factors, whereas the alternative term to the internal environment is domestic factors/environment.

Regarding the psychological environment, it refers to the policy-maker's perception of the operational environment. The central question is: How do the related policy-making elite perceive the operational environment? That is to say, in what way does the policy-maker imagine the situation will determine the output of foreign policy behaviour? This is considered to be the master key to unlock explanation of foreign policy changes for the above scholars.

The study of perception, in fact, started in the Second World War. In the very beginning, "many students of world politics turned their attention to the ways in which different elites approached problems of international conflict and cooperation."⁷ In 1953, Nathan Leites published a book, focused on the impact of Soviet leaders' spirit and mentality on Russian foreign policy.⁸ In 1957, Harold and Margaret Sprout's joint paper, entitled "Environmental Factors in the Study of International Politics," pioneered the application of decision-making theory to foreign policy in terms of identifying the distinction between decision makers' psychological factors and operational environments.⁹

As the title suggests, the environmental factor (including both international and domestic dimensions) is argued to be significant in the explanation of foreign policy behaviours. However, it is important not because of what the environmental factor actually is, but rather what the decision maker perceives it to be. In the words of Harold and Margaret Sprout, they concluded:¹⁰ "With respect to policy making and the content of policy decisions, our position is that what matters is how the policy maker imagines the milieu to be, not how it actually is."

Two years later, Kenneth Boulding echoed the Sprouts' study arguing that 'we must recognize that the people whose decisions determine the policies and actions of nations do not respond to the "objective" facts of the situation, whatever that may mean, but to their image of the situation. It is what we think the world is like, not what it is really like that determines our behaviour.'¹¹ Based on the same assumption,

⁷ Alexander L. George, "The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2, June 1969, p192.

⁸ Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, Illinois: The Free Press, 1953.

⁹ Naomi Bailin Wish, "Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4, December 1980, p532.

¹⁰ Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout, 1957, pp327-28.

¹¹ K. E. Boulding, 1959, pp120-21.

Snyder believed the “subjective factors” of policy makers play an important role in the process of decision output, and stressed that “nation-state action is determined by the way in which the situation is defined subjectively by those charged with responsibility for making choices.”¹²

The above argument stresses that the relation among the operational environment, decision makers’ perception, and foreign policy forms a significant causality for investigators to explain the outcome of policy changes. Hyam Gold pointed out the operational environment is the explanatory variable, policy makers perception is the intervening variable, and national decision is the dependent variable.¹³ The chain of causation in the argument can be depicted as bellow:

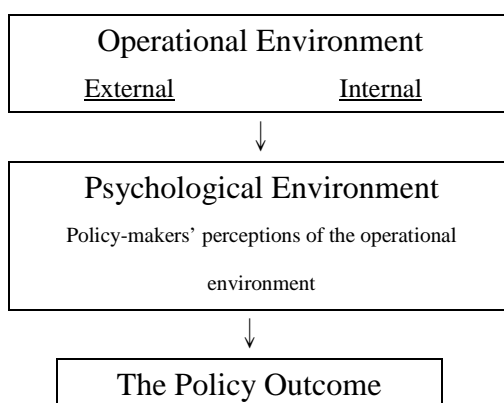


Figure 1. Perception and Foreign Policy

Given the fundamental framework for explaining policy changes, the question, then, arises: what are the possible independent variables in the external and internal dimensions of the operational environment? The variables most commonly concerned by theorists in the literature on the study of the perception and policy change are national status (political, military and economic capabilities), interest groups, and competing elites in terms of the internal environment, and in particular the external relations with the adversarial or ally countries in terms of the external dimension.¹⁴ Naomi Wish pointed out the national status is related to power and influence in the international politics, which is determined by economic and military power.¹⁵

¹² Richard C. Snyder and Glenn D. Paige, “The United States Decision to Resist Aggression in Korea,” in Richard C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin edits, *Foreign Policy Decision Making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963, p212.

¹³ Hyam Gold, “Foreign Policy Decision-Making and the Environment: The Claims of Snyder, Brecher, and the Sprouts,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 1978, p571-2.

¹⁴ Naomi Bailin Wish, 1980, pp536-43, K. J. Holsti, “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No.3, September 1970, pp245-56, and Michael Brecher et al., 1969, pp81-5.

¹⁵ Naomi Wish, 1980, p536.

The front refers to all the resources available to a national external behaviour, and the latter is about the ability to launch war or prevent other states from attacking.¹⁶ How the policy-makers perceive their national status affects the outcome of foreign policy.

In a democracy, the competing elites' challenge to the authority comes from different factions within the ruling party and in particular from the opposition party, which vie for power. However, in a single-party authoritarian country, either the competing factions within the party or the various interest groups generate the pressure on foreign policy. Regarding the interest groups, it can be classified as four identical types which are institutional, associational, nonassociational, and anomic. The definition of these four terms, in turn, are: 1. Military establishments, bureaucratic organizations, and religious institutions. 2. Trade union, business organizations, peasant associations, ethnic and civic groups, etc. 3. Kinship and lineage groups, regional, status, and class groups, etc. 4. The more or less spontaneous penetrations by unorganised parts of society into the party system in the form of riots, demonstrations, assassinations, etc.¹⁷

These theorists intended to establish a set of independent variables for research on policy-makers' perceptions. Although there are many sub-variables introduced, the variables which apply to case study vary. Some scholars turned their focus on policy-makers' perception of "adversarial" countries, and assume that how the decision-makers perceive their enemies determines the foreign policy behaviour.¹⁸ The variable in the external environment is defined by Dian Zinnes as the enemy's hostility attitudes toward the perceiver country.¹⁹ Holsti, North, and Brody focus on the adversarial country's "policy" towards the perceiver country.²⁰

Principles of freedom and equality of access adopted by the IFLA:

As the leading international member organization in the field of Information and Library Science, the IFLA sets out a strategic scheme to ensure its policy and action servicing for the library and information community in the world. Ellen Tise, President of the IFLA, pointed out that

¹⁶ Michael Brecher et al., 1969, pp83-4, and K. J. Holsti, 1970, p245.

¹⁷ Michael Brecher et al., 1969, pp84-5.

¹⁸ Nathan Leites, 1953, Dina A. Zinnes, "The Expression and Perception of Hostility in Prewar Crisis: 1914," in J. David Singer ed. *Quantitative International Politics: Insights and Evidence*, New York: Free Press, 1968. Alexander L. George, 1969, and Ole R. Holsti, "Foreign Policy Behaviour Viewed Cognitively," in Robert Axelrod edit, *Structure of Decision*, Princeton: Princeton University, 1976.

¹⁹ Dina A. Zinnes, 1968.

²⁰ Ole R. Holsti et al., 1968.

“The role and position of libraries is rapidly changing to match the growing influence of the Internet, the digitization of knowledge, and the expanding impact of online social networking tools. To continue its role, the IFLA Strategic Plan sets out IFLA’s strategic directions and goals for 2010-2015. It is a Strategic Plan to guide the governance and the entire activities of the IFLA organization.” (Ellen Tise, 2009)²¹

The quotation above demonstrates the importance of the Strategic Plan not only for the IFLA but also for people to understand IFLA’s policy direction. Although the outline of every IFLA Strategic Plan may vary, it does not change its strategic directions and goals in guiding IFLA’s actions and policies.²² Taking IFLA Strategic Plan for 2010-2015 (Version I) as an example, we could see it starts from introduction to vision, mission, core values, each strategic direction with its goals and priority activities (2010-2011), and scope of the IFLA Strategic Plan. That is the Strategic Plan when Ellen Tise was elected as President of the IFLA.²³

After Ingrid Parent came to power in 2011, the strategic direction of the Strategic Plan remains unchanged. However, the core values part was moved into the very beginning of the strategic plan and President Parent resets the priority activities (2012-2013) for each strategic direction in the Strategic Plan (Version II).²⁴

The principle of freedom of and the belief of equality of access to information were put in Strategic Plan 2006-2009 as the top two core values by the IFLA policy-makers,²⁵ which are:

- 1. The endorsement of the principles of freedom of access to information, ideas and works of imagination and freedom of expression embodied in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*
- 2. The belief that people, communities and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well-being.*

²¹ Ellen R. Tise, *IFLA Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (Version I)*, approved by the Governing Board of IFLA, p1, 2009, <http://www.ifla.org/strategic-plan/archive>.

²² The IFLA official website says “recently the Governing Board reviewed the Strategic Plan 2010-2015. The four strategic directions and the goals were endorsed without change for 2012-2013.” Dated November 29, 2012, <http://www.ifla.org/strategic-plan>.

²³ According to the IFLA Statutes 13.2, the IFLA President “shall serve a single term of two years.” *IFLA Statutes*, p10. Ellen Tise became the IFLA President in 2009 and stepped down in 2011.

²⁴ Ingrid Parent, *IFLA Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (Version II)*, approved by the Governing Board of IFLA, p1-4, 2011.

²⁵ *Strategic Plan 2006-2009*, <http://www.ifla.org/strategic-plan/2006-2009>.

These two core values are, for the first time, endorsed by the policymakers within the IFLA and written in the Strategic Plan by the IFLA decision makers. This direction, more focusing on equitable and free access to information, was very likely influenced by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

IFLA and libraries and information services share the common vision of an Information Society for all, as adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in November 2003. That vision promotes an inclusive society in which everyone will be able to find, create, access, use and share information and knowledge.

2003-2005 Three Pillars:J

Although policy statement does not include principles of “free access to information” and “equitable access to information,” the belief of “free access to information” was emphasized in the presentation made by President Kay Raseroka, President elected Alex Byrne. It was put in the first pillar “Society” which two programs were written in the “IFLA’s special programs directed toward societal matters” sector. The first program reads “Committee on Free Access to information and freedom of expression” (FAIFE).²⁶

International Telecommunication Union Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis:

In 1998, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) assembled and hosted a plenipotentiary conference in the city Minneapolis located in the U.S. state of Minnesota. In the meantime, the representative from Tunisia proposed a new plan which made an awareness of the unequal access to information and knowledge between developed countries and developing ones. The proposal was approved by the ITU via a resolution numbered 73 (Resolution 73), which promises to hold a World Summit on the Information Society and, then, placed on the agenda of the United Nations.²⁷

The ITU council, in 2001, decided to deal with the issue concerned by Resolution 73

²⁶ IFLA’s President Kay Raseroka (2003-2005), IFLA’s President elected Alex Byrne (2005-2007), “IFLA’s Three Pillars and WSIS,” p8, 2004, <http://www.ifla.org/publications/iflas-three-pillars-and-wsis>.

²⁷ “Why a World Summit on the Information Society,” the official website of the World Summit on the Information Society: Geneva 2003-Tunis 2005, <http://www.itu.int/wsis/basic/why.html>.

in two phases. A World Summit on the Information Society will be held respectively in December 2003, in Geneva, and in November 2005, in Tunis.

The General Assembly of the United Nations took concrete action backing up the decision made by the ITU in terms of pursuing an equal access to information and issued Resolution 56/183. The General Assembly,

“Taking note of the action plan presented by the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union ...for the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society and the creation, by the Administrative Committee on Coordination, of a high-level Summit organizing committee, chaired by the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union ...,”

“Considering that the Summit is to be convened under the patronage of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with the International Telecommunication Union taking the lead role in its preparation, in cooperation with interested United Nations bodies and other international organizations as well as the host countries,”(General Assembly, UN, 2002)²⁸

We can also see the UN has a common ground, in its Resolution 53/183, with what the ITU advocates in the Resolution 73, and this provides a better understanding of the UN’s action supporting the ITU in this issue. The General Assembly,

“Recognizing also the pivotal role of the United Nations system in promoting development, in particular with respect to access to and transfer of technology, especially information and communication technologies and services, ...,”

“Convinced of the need, at the highest political level, to marshal the global consensus and commitment required to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development so as to reap the full benefits of the information and communication technologies revolution, and to address the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society, through the development of a common vision and understanding of the information society and the adoption of a declaration and plan of action for implementation by Governments, international institutions and all sectors of civil society,” (General Assembly, UN, 2002)²⁹

Apparently, the decision made by the ITU, which was endorsed by the UN, clearly put

²⁸ Resolution 56/183, General Assembly, UN,, page 1-2,
http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/56_183_unga_2002.pdf.

²⁹ Resolution 56/183, General Assembly, UN,, page 1,
http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/56_183_unga_2002.pdf.

a strong argument that the Information Society needs to make an awareness of the significance of both freedom of access to information and equitable access to information not only in the world but also within countries. In 2003, the ITU started to hold the WSIS.

WSIS's common version of the Information Society:

With the UN's endorsement, the ITU eventually held the first phase of the WSIS in December 10 to 12, 2003, in Geneva. It is the origins of the Principles of Freedom and Equality adopted by the IFLA policymakers. I will explain it later on this session. There were more than one hundred countries participating this submit and many constructive consensus were concluded. These help uncover how the IFLA developed its core values. In the session of "*Our Common Vision of the Information Society*," it reads

"We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, ..."

The quotation above demonstrates the WSIS, in 2003, built up a perspective for the Information Society in which every one is given the freedom of access to information and knowledge. The submit was endorsed by all the participants from different countries in the world. No doubt, the principle of the freedom of access to information, in particular those collected by libraries, becomes a crucial core value in the knowledge world at 21st century soon after the WSIS's common version of the Information Society was reached in 2003. As the leading role in the Information Society, the IFLA policymakers must take action in response to the WSIS's declaration in the issue of freedom of access to information.

This paper has been interested in two core values adopted by the IFLA policymakers since its Strategic Plan 2006 – 2009, which are freedom of access to information society and equitable access to information. Once again, although we could only trace back to the two core beliefs written in IFLA's Strategic Plan 2006 – 2009 at earliest, these two principles actually were found in IFLA's 2003-2005 Three Pillars when President Kay Raseroka and President elected Alex Byrne made their presentation in 2004.³⁰

³⁰ Please refer to page 5 of this paper.

The question then arisen how the IFLA developed one of its core values, the equitable access to information. The following quotation may provide the answer to it.

“We reaffirm, as an essential foundation of the Information Society, and as outlined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Communication is a fundamental social process, a basic human need and the foundation of all social organization. It is central to the Information Society. Everyone, everywhere should have the opportunity to participate and no one should be excluded from the benefits the Information Society offers.”

IFLA’s policymakers’ perception of the WSIS:

Libraries and information services are essential to the effective operation of the inclusive Information Society. IFLA and libraries and information services share the common vision of an Information Society for all, as adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in November 2003.³¹

To enable access to information by all peoples, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions is committed to the fundamental human rights to know, learn and communicate without restriction. It opposes censorship and supports balance and fairness in intellectual property regulation. IFLA is also vitally concerned to promote multilingual content, cultural diversity and the special needs of Indigenous peoples, minorities and those with disabilities.

IFLA, working with its members, the profession and other partners, will advance the position of libraries and information services and their capacity to contribute to the development of individuals and communities through access to information and culture. It was put in the Strategic Plan 2006-2009, before Ellen Tise came to power.

As a membership organization, IFLA serves the interests of its members and draws both its mandate and global reach from them. This plan establishes the priorities of the IFLA Governing Board for the period 2006-2009 and is intended to guide both its work and that of IFLA's divisions, sections and other activities. It will be reviewed annually by the Governing Board and presented to Council.

³¹ IFLANET, “*Alexandria Manifesto on Libraries, the Information Society in Action*,” adopted in Alexandria, Egypt, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, on 11 November 2005.

Conclusion:

As a leading international organization in the information and library science, the IFLA's core values, freedom and equity of access to information, play a unique role for world-wide libraries. In particular, the two significant values were endorsed by the WSIS which had more than one hundred countries participating in. No doubt, the common version of the Information Society reached by all the representatives of the WSIS can not be neglected. However, the two core values should be taken into account when the policy-makers of libraries are planning their new policies.

This article finds that the two core values, adopted by the IFLA policy-makers, are strongly influenced by the World Summit on the Information Society held by ITU in 2003. Soon after these two important values were advocated by IFLA's President Kay Raseroka and President elect Alex Byrne in their presentation made in 2004. Since 2006, the two principles have been written in the IFLA's Strategic Plan as the core values directing the IFLA's policy.

List of Abbreviations for the Purpose of Citation

IFLA	International Federation Library Association
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
UN	United Nations
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society

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