

Rapport: IFLA World Library and Information Conference . Athens 2019

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The 2019 IFLA World Library and Information Conference in Athens was a first for me. Thanks to the travel bursary awarded to me by Svensk Biblioteksförningen (SBF) when I was a LIS student, I was able to be one of upwards of 3600 guest in attendance. It was an exciting experience, much like being given a chocolate box of 100 luxury bonbons and only 1 hour to eat them all in.

My approach was to try and orientate myself around what was on offer and to gain an understanding of the structure of IFLA while at the same time learn a bit more about the areas that interest me in LIS, namely, library services in multicultural contexts, LIS on the African continent, Children and Youth libraries, Knowledge Management, Digitisation role in libraries today and the general future of libraries. It was impossible to attend all the talks and business meetings relevant to these multiple areas as sessions often ran parallel to one another. However a Nobel attempt was made on my part.

To follow is a summary of the sessions attended and the most interesting points that came up for me.

Sessions attended by day

25th:

New commers session

Received an introduction to the workings of the event and was introduced to different sectors as well as the chair of IFLA.

Opening Session

The general opening session for the whole event, by the president and chair of IFLA was presented with statistics of amount of attendees , ca. 3600 and the theme of the conference “Dialogue for Change” and a key note address given by De Loukas Tsoukalis . Followed by dance performance around the theme of Greek history of Libraries and the history of reading.

Africa – Business meeting

Attended the Africa business meeting due to personal interest in the digital divide and because I am South African. Learnt about how Special sections work within IFLA such as that they have satellite meetings prior to attending IFLA WLIC etc. Also learnt about other library organisations within Africa that are useful for further collaboration, which I found hard to find when writing my thesis about representation of African Libraries collections on digital libraries. Specifically, the organisations names are: SPARC, AFLIA and ATINA. I also joined their mailing list to remain in touch. Of interest was an upcoming Open Access meeting in Cape Town where they will be discussion South to South solutions for information exchange.

Exhibition Opening

Attended the exhibition opening party . Took note of latest supporting tools for library world as well as publishers and organisations.

26th:

IFLA's Presidents Sessions: Dialogue for Change: Inspiring, Engaging, Enabling and Connecting the motors for change

Here the leaving president of IFLA, Gloria Perez-Salmeron hosted a panel discussion with three people she had meaningful dialogues with during her two year term that she believed to set the tone for the conference them: Dialogue for change:

The first concerned the need for libraries to evolve faster and to get more involved in the decision making moments regarding the current change processes in larger society, especially in relation to policies around digitisation essentially encouraging collaboration across fields and advocating for libraries relevance in the bigger picture.

The second and third concerned IFLA's work across borders projects in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. One concerned a community development project in Fiji that enabled the breaking of silences based in fear of incompetency which resulted in thriving community based projects. The final presentation concerned Open Access Law library project in Africa that increase the collaborations between law libraries and professionals.

Conclusive remarks concerned the relevance of library work and it's relevance to various fields outside of librarianship.

Datamining and Artificial intelligence: Artificial intelligence to transform knowledge management and information services in libraries and information organizations – knowledge management with information technology and Big Data

Attended due to my recent studies in digital libraries and information services. We were presented with four datamining projects from around the world after an introduction on the relevance of Datamining. Namely, the ability of machines to process large amounts of data and to find patterns which amount to what AI is about. The problems with datamining concern us not knowing why we get the results we get and of course ethical ones, as we have little understanding of how the masses of data generated via the applications we use today are being used. Not to mention the issue of personal integrity where deidentification promises that follow many digital applications are not really effective in the face of the processing power machines have today. Big Data processing means that identification of an individual can be established with only three common elements across a dataset .

The of interest projects presented that made use of data mining in library context where a book finding application for Oodi library in Helsinki that used data from the library catalogue and from events close to the library to make a user friend app that promoted unused library books in the catalogue. Another project was a program- Yewno- that extracts data from MARC records and converts them into linked data to make catalogues accessible on the semantic web (see link below). The third concerned the National Library of Singapore that is turning their catalogue into linked data to make it discoverable on the semantic web , but they had to create their own authority files or RDA references for their culturally unique recourses.

Legislators' Panel: What law makers think about libraries:

This was a panel discussion between local politician in Aarhus- Azaf-Ahmad Rabih and former EU member of parliament and legislator Catherine Stihler. Both were enthusiastic about the important role libraries play beyond preserving and making books accessible. Namely the role they play in advocating for Open Access in a privatising information economy and the empowering force they can be especially for immigrant and refugee communities. They encouraged libraries to invite politicians to the libraries to show them what they are doing to help the communities, continued collaborations with external parties and in that way advocate for libraries continued relevance in political agendas.

Strengthening the global voice, preserving the future of libraries:

Discussed here where the importance of advocacy for libraries to maintain and boost their position in society. Tips were given as to how to achieve this e.g. library marking their significance on various highlighted days throughout the year eg. Human rights day, World literacy day, etc. There is also a recourse in the IFLA site – Library Map of the World, which is to be built up with content from library projects that other libraries can use for inspiration for advocating for in their local libraries (see links below). Another useful document is the Development and Access to Information report which highlight what one can do for one's own library through providing access to information to meet the Sustainable Development Goals set out by the United Nations (See link below) .

Children and Young adults- Business meeting

Was only able to stay until 18:00 so missed the last 45 minutes. Participated in suggestions for activities for the up coming two years. Got to meet the active IFLA members in my professional area. Was informed of a Swedish project that works to integrate the Children's Convention in the libraries.

27th:

Library Services for a Multicultural World with Special consideration for the many cultures involved- Division 3.

Here five flash presentations were made around the professional area of Library Services (division 3) in specific reference to multicultural settings. The sections that presented concerned Subject Analysis and Access, Indigenous Matters, Knowledge Management, Library Services for people with special needs and Reference and Information services.

The presentation around subject analysis concerned the cultural bias that continues to be reflected in subject authority files that exclude non-western cultural knowledge, they emphasised the need for inclusion of the multicultural cultural knowledge of library professionals in these systems.

With regards to library services with special needs, the presenting library included refugees amongst people with special needs emphasising the need not only for refugees to be provided services that help them find their bearings in their new countries but also encourage the local community to understand and make place for them.

The Knowledge Management presentation focused on using social media platforms and application combined with KM systems like linked data as a means of being able to share knowledge across cultures in non-linear as well as popular accessible ways.

The presentation concerned with reference and information services focused on the need for empathy when providing such services.

Indigenous Matters focused on the importance of library professionals to analyse their indigenous literacy as a means of advocating for multicultural representation in libraries.

After the flash presentation we sat in smaller groups and exchanged best practice from our experience related to a central question from each presentation.

Poster Exhibition

Over 140 posters were presented. This was easily the most giving part of the conference and more space and time should have been given to it. I only managed to get to about 20 posters out of the 140 in-between seminars and business meetings. My focus pertained largely to multicultural libraries, projects affecting children's libraries and digitisation projects in African libraries. From these I gathered contact details. Of particular interest for me was Sweden's plan for library managers to implement Children's Convention in their libraries and an augmented reality application from Denmark to encourage children's to discover the sections of the children's library. On speaking to an African Library project that had an active cultural heritage digitization project on the go, I discovered that they were not aware of the transnational cultural heritage digital libraries that would be perfect places to host their content.

It's Good to Preserve. It's even better to share: Sound and Visual culture heritage in local communities – Audio-visual and multimedia

Here, six presentations were provided showing how libraries have supported communities through digitization projects that preserve their cultural heritage. The projects ranged from preserving negatives in analogue format to using digital platforms to inform library visitors of events related to the section of the library they are visiting and making the natural wonders of the protected and little visited Galapagos islands available to the world.

28th

Libraries at the centre of community transformation

Three African libraries, one public library in South Africa, the national library of Nigeria and the university library in Botswana presented ways in which they have been able to identify the sustainable development goals within their organisations. They were not able to attain all goals, but managed with the resources and expertise that they had, to attain some. Such through the development of digital institutional repository for the International University of Botswana via collaborations, the supporting of educational efforts for self-lead learning through applying design thinking and collaborating with partners in the public libraries in Johannesburg South Africa and Nigeria's comprehensive investigation into the activities of libraries within Nigeria in relation to the sustainable development goals.

Takeaways

All in all as a first time visitor to IFLA I found the event very inspiring and empowering. Many ideas were shared and contacts exchanged. It was giving to see the broader context of the library industry and made me realise as a library professional at the beginning of my career, how I can work on both the macro and micro level and look forward to seeing what sort of collaborations can come out of what I learnt here. In addition, I have become more of an advocate than ever of the role that libraries play in the bigger picture of the political and social changes we witness today.

On the fun side, I attended the conference with two friends who are librarians in Sweden, one from Italy originally and the other from Peru originally and with me being from South Africa originally, we were often met with the comment from other professionals outside of Sweden of how diverse Swedish libraries appeared because of our presence. We know that this is not really the fact in Sweden but maybe one can interpret these reactions as a sign of the changing face of Swedish Libraries. Having said that, more effort on my part could have been put into meeting other SBF representatives, which did not really happen. None the less many thanks to SBF for this amazing and energy giving opportunity!



Myself (far left) and fellow Swedish Librarians at the new comers breakfast, Athens 2019