

Reflections on the IFLA Conference

by Siong Ng

In August 2013, I had the privilege of attending the International Federation for Library Associations (IFLA) congress in Singapore. It was a very prestigious conference and attracted about 3700 delegates from around the world. It was an amazing experience to be part of the congress and to be involved in the Religious Libraries in Dialogue Special Interest Group (RENDIAL) – see supplementary file, appendix 1. There was a major discussion about “open access” and how it affected the library in facilitating access to content. I would like to acknowledge the financial sponsorship from Carey Baptist College and ANZTLA in making this attendance possible.



The congress started off with satellite meetings in various discipline interest groups. I attended the Social Science Librarians standing committee meeting. Odile Duport the chair of RENDIAL presented a report. Below is a summary:

- It took Odile 3 years to set up an Interest group within IFLA. She is retiring this year and currently has two potential candidates to replace her. She is concerned that she is unable to find a suitable replacement. It is essential to find a suitable candidate that is able to advocate for the group and is supported by his or her organisation.
- A forthcoming book entitled *Libraries Serving Dialogue* – see supplementary file, appendix 2 – will be published next year. Thus far, Odile has already received a number of good contributions for the book. The book will be published by De Gruyter and edited by Odile and Michael Heaney.

The interest group is very supportive of Odile’s work and the work of RENDIAL.

The RENDIAL session was held on Tuesday 20 August. There were five different presentations at that session and I was one of the presenters. The topics that were covered included preservation, facilitating access to resources and information literacy. It was an honour to have an audience sourced from 6 continents and including a monk and a couple of muslims. However, I was disappointed that the topics covered were all based on one religion which is Christianity. It would have been a much more enriching session if other religious activities were presented.



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One particular event of interest was the discussion on open access. Various models and initiatives were presented but the conclusion can be summarized as below:

- It is still not safe to put your work on the World Wide Web
- Is not acceptable culturally
- Uncertainty of the reliability of resources freely available online

Taylor & Francis Group presented a research paper entitled *Facilitating Discovery of Free Online Resources: Challenges and Opportunities for the Library Community* which is available online.¹

The issue of free online resources has been a topic that has been discussed at various levels among academic staff and librarians. Issues such as licensing, copyright, cost and reliability are a challenge for information providers. One of the ways a journal publisher reacted to this is by coming up with a new model. The open access model requires authors to pay while readers gain access for free. Institutions such as The University of Auckland run Open Access Week yearly to address this issue.

I also found the various papers presented on loaning ebook readers useful. The National Library of Singapore started off a service by loaning out ereaders and ipads. There were a number of papers presented by the staff at the National Library which was beneficial. This could be another resource that I could provide for my disabled users and distance students. Of course there are many issues that need to be addressed first, such as lending rights and practicality of the service. I also learnt about the ebooks app.

The *IFLA Trend Report* launch was another highlight. The report can be read online.²


In summary, the trends are societal, and the aim is to encourage discussion on how these societal trends will affect libraries.

The five trends are:

1. New technologies will both expand and limit who has access to information
2. Online education will transform and disrupt traditional learning
3. Boundaries of data protection and privacy will be redefined
4. Hyperconnected societies will listen to and empower new groups
5. The global information economy will be transformed by new technologies

1 <http://www.tandf.co.uk/libsite/pdf/TF-whitepaper-free-resources.pdf>

2 <http://trends.ifla.org>



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Many questions based on trends 1 and 3 were raised such as user behaviour and how libraries can engage with the process. There is an ongoing discussion which allows people to comment on the discussion forum. Personally, I am interested to see how libraries engage with our users with new technologies available rapidly and how it will affect third world country libraries.

Lunch time sessions organised by OCLC were amazing. The presentation on the power of shared data was interesting but the ability to network with other librarians was even more beneficial. I met with the CEO of OCLC and Augus Cook the Australia/NZ sales consultant. I have also learnt more about CONTENTdm and am at the stage of implementing it as a digital thesis repository for our college.

Before the congress, I also took the opportunity to network with two theological colleges in Singapore. I visited Singapore Bible College and Trinity Theological College library. I spent about 2 hours in each library discussing library policies, acquisitions and technology in the current environment. I also took the opportunity to invite the librarians to attend future ANZTLA conferences.

Personal observations

- Interestingly enough Amazon and Apple don't sell ereaders or ebooks in Singapore
- There is no food provided during the congress. Future delegates will be required to organise their own meals. This is a huge congress; you have to make extra effort to network with other delegates.
- The highlight was the opportunity to meet and chat with the New Zealand National Librarian- Bill MacNaught
- I like the idea of a poster session at the future ANZTLA conferences. The Poster session is an excellent way to communicate summaries of library projects or services to delegates.

Conclusion

IFLA is definitely a worthwhile conference to attend and I am fortunate to have been able to attend.

Two of the documents that Siong Ng was given at the IFLA conference can be viewed by downloading the supplementary file (on the right-hand-side under Reading Tools).