



Review of the 2008 International Federation of Library Associations Annual Conference

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Photos courtesy of Ray Schwartz

Opening Comments:

My second IFLA conference differed from the first in being in a more benign setting (Quebec versus Durban, South Africa), being simply one day of travel rather than two and a half, and my own growing familiarity with the IFLA bureaucracy that is dense. Quebec City was lovely as it celebrates its 400th anniversary with lots of music, street performances and welcoming residents. As for IFLA, I continue to be amazed by the variety of people and issues that come together for a week of communication and policy setting. I attend as ACRL's Science and Technology Section's representative to IFLA's Science and Technology Standing Committee.

Satellite Meeting: Science Policies and Science Portals

This pre-conference, held at Polytechnique de Montreal, presented a spectrum of speakers starting with Howard Alper who chairs Canada's Science, Trade and Innovation Council. He presented Canada's approach to shaping innovation through governmental policies and incentives. I enjoyed his thoughts, as he's a scientist who finally saw the light about being politically active as an advocate for science. Others such as Liu Xiwen from the National Science Library of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Elizabeth Newbold from the British Library and Ho Nam Choi from the Korea Institute for Science and Technology Information described their institutional efforts to scientific information with researchers and decision makers. Thomas Lahr from the USGS Biological Informatics Program explained how Science.gov, a portal to US government science, is a piece in the larger effort, [worldscience.org](http://www.worldscience.org). Many of us in the audience were intrigued by his description of his audience as the "science attentive citizen." It's a phrase that suggests engagement and curiosity.

We were fortunate to have Richard Ackerman from the Canadian Institute of Science and Technology Information provide a wrap-up given the variety of speakers, approaches and scales. The common theme concerned how digital content motivates change, why we need to look beyond our traditional communities of users, why we should support higher levels of analysis and policy support and how to integrate tools and technologies outside of our libraries. Of course, the real wrap-up was a tour of the library (<http://www.polymtl.ca/biblio/>), and talking out the ideas of the day with colleagues.



Courtesy of ST Committee Member Ray Schwartz, this is the bridge connecting the two section of the Polytechnique Library. The windows look out into the atrium and down six floors. Students love the bar seating. Below is another view.



Science and Technology Standing Committee Meetings & Session:

The next day is was on to Quebec via train for the first of two committee meetings. These typically involve a review of IFLA business such as reorganization, recruitment of committee members and revenue. We also spent time on conference evaluation and planning. The 2009 conference will be in late August in Milan with a theme of “Libraries create futures: building on cultural heritage.” We decided to focus our session on “Open Access to Science and Technology Research
☐Worldwide: Strategies and Best Practices.” Much of our conversation focused on possible projects to tackle that would give our committee members something to work on beyond the conference. Ideas discussed included training and mentoring science librarians in developing countries, science literature for children, open access, promoting libraries to scientists, environmental issues, data curation, and e-science. We decided again to focus on open access within the context of access to science information globally. We will look at models of access with an attempt to promote different mechanisms depending on context.

A final topic facing the Committee was responding to the Green Paper on Copyright in the Knowledge Economy recently distributed by the Commission on the European Communities (http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/copyright/docs/copyright-info/greenpaper_en.pdf.) Our German and Finnish members urged the Committee to request the IFLA General Council to comment on the paper as requested by the authors. This lead to us writing a resolution to that effect that was later taken to the Committee on Copyright and Legal Affairs. It goes to show that a small committee can do something if the information is there and people are willing to speak up. Our concerns included format shifting, orphan works, publisher repositories and distance learning.

Our 2008 session theme was “Science Across Libraries: provision of science and technology information resources and services in diverse settings” conceived to complement the conference theme of “Libraries Without Borders.” Walter Warnick went into the history and future of worldwidescience.org. Its origins are steeped in the premises that science progresses when knowledge is shared and science drives development and social progress. Currently, this global science gateway involves 40 portals and 50 countries. The main backbone is the US government science agencies and the British Library. It’s worth looking at as the goal is worthy – make available science truly available. We also heard a description of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (www.biodiversitylibrary.org), a digital library providing open access to the core taxonomic literature. It’s an ambitious project attempting to link?? the species pages in the Encyclopedia of Life with the taxonomic and other relevant literature. Two projects on smaller scales also illustrated science without borders. Elizabeth Greyling from South Africa addressed the limited flow of scientific information into rural populations with the installation of community kiosks that provided community health information as well as basic high school science curricula. Don MacMillan from the University of Calgary illustrated how to use freely available patent and genomic data in the science classroom.

Conference Highlights

I concentrated my attention on sessions addressing copyright, intellectual property, digital projects and scholarly communication, and there were plenty. I will highlight a few and offer some observations of themes.

Digital Projects:

Gunter Mulberger from the University of Innsbruck described an e-books on demand project involving 13 libraries in 7 countries. It is an intriguing model for how to work on digitizing your historic collection when funding is limited. This system responds to users' requests with the first requester paying on average 50 Euros for the scan of the requested book, usually 200-300 pages. The requestor receives a PDF or CD and then the file is linked to the catalog record two to three months later. Customer satisfaction is high in the pilot project. It seems to work as the audience would actually like to own these rare, out-of-print, or historic volumes, but they are not readily available at a reasonable price.

Copyright:

As we were in Canada, I finally learned about Crown copyright and how it differs from US copyright. Chabriol Colebatch, copyright officer at McMaster University, gave a thoughtful presentation on Crown Copyright and the Privatization of Information. The government retains control of all government information under Crown copyright. The government can give exclusive and non-exclusive rights for its use. But, the public does not have free access to government information. It made me realize that we may chafe over restrictions, but at least have a starting place of access rather than restriction.



Courtesy of Ray Schwartz

Denise Nicholson, University of the Witwatersrand of South Africa, compared and contrasted the copyright regime in Uganda and South Africa. It was an interesting follow-through as Crown Copyright is the modal given the countries' histories. Recent acts in both countries have promoted more transparent government and access to its information. However, control and ownership remain problematic: information is power.

Legal deposit was discussed by several. Harald Von Hielcrome from the University Library of Aarhus in Denmark, described legal deposit as the best way to ensure the literary heritage of a country. Denmark has had a legal deposit law since 1697, IN 1997 it was expanded to cover everything published in a physical medium and then in 2004 expanded to include digital publications. That's when the National Library began quarterly harvests of all internet sites ending with a ".dk". It is technically possible but the copyright and privacy issues abound. They are working on who should have access to this trove of information and what legal obligations exist to inform people whose information has been harvested. It seems like an overwhelming project, but other countries are also harvesting their parts of the internet as an obligation of legal deposit. Gildas Illien of the National Library France discussed efforts to archive the French internet although the focus was more on the technology. Canada is also harvesting government web sites periodically (www.collectionscanada.gov.ca) because of a mandate from the Library and Archives of Canada Act.

Management Concepts:

One session on public/private partnerships provided food for thought. James Neal gave a framework to conceptualize and review possible partnerships. He suggested several areas of possible partnerships including building digital libraries, preserving digital content, supporting the needs of big science, and marketing the library. Lynn Brindley of the British Library illustrated such partnerships in her library's digitization efforts. The BL partnered with Gale for a newspaper mass digitization where Gale digitized and hosted the collection and/but? gave UK libraries and higher education institutions free access while charging others. The project started small, built trust, and lead to an understating of cultures and needs. She reminded all that we need excellent negotiation skills when launching into public/private partnerships, and relationships can be slow to grow.

Sometimes the unexpected session gives you new perspectives and ideas at IFLA. Here are three I stumbled into. A small Scottish library wanted to use Web 2.0 tools to expand its presence and engage its users. It did so by using Facebook to promote events and a wiki to start building a local history project. Both were simple and doable by a small staff with limited IT support. The Cyber Cemetery, http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/browse_atoz.htm, is a on online archive of websites of US government agencies or commissions that no longer operate. The project housed at the University of North Texas protects at-risk born digital information (e.g. the Columbia Accident Investigation Board or the US Commission on Ocean Policy). A third example was a simple, inexpensive method for observing how people used the library in terms of space, time and function. Three classes of users were defined: the classic user, the social user and the digital user.

User rights:

This session looked at rights issues on the international level with local perspectives. Kenneth Crews gave a solid presentation on library exceptions to rights of copyright owners. These exceptions are a mainstay of our business, but far from uniform throughout the world. The major similarities as well as differences were found studying the statutes from 149 of the 184 member countries of WIPO (http://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/doc_details.jsp?doc_id=109192). Most laws include exceptions for library copying and research use. There is less agreement on inter-library loan, copying on the premises, and limitations on liabilities. Crews suggested that these differences are due to politics, competing interests, varying economic and cultural values as well as history (e.g. who colonized whom). It is daunting to consider how to get more congruity among national laws but intriguing to explore.

Teresa Hackett from eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) described this group's copyright project that seeks to provide a basic, draft provision for exceptions. This is an element of eIFL's wider mission to improve copyright law around the world through training, networking expertise and advocacy. Mark Haslet from the University of Waterloo used Canadian copyright to explain fair dealing and library exceptions. It was useful to have the issues of exceptions grounded into a national setting. Finally, Jim Neal of Columbia University spoke to the 'failed' Section 108 Study Group in his talk titled "Fair Use Is Not Civil Disobedience." Here he gave an overview of Fair Use as defined in U.S. copyright laws and then went through the sage(not sure what this means) of the Section 108 Study Group who were charged to review this section of copyright law with library exceptions. It was a missed opportunity to respond to changes in the information landscape as well as an ongoing risk to existing library exceptions. His discussion clearly outlined the clash between the concerns of rights holders and those of libraries. His was a clear call to protect Fair Use.

Two Speakers of Note:

During the Opening ceremonies, the Governor General of Canada Michaelle Jean addressed the audience with a passionate reminder of the importance of libraries in lives of all. She recounted her childhood in Haiti where reading was sacred and access to books cherished. She was a fitting inspiration for all.

I chanced in on my other noteworthy speaker during a lunch symposium. The Honourable James K. Bartleman has served Canada well as Foreign and Defense Minister to Canada's Prime Minister, as Canada's ambassador to Cuba, Israel, NATO and the European Union and High Commissioner to South Africa and Australia, and finally Lieutenant Governor of Ontario retiring in 2007. His story is compelling and his commitment to literacy heartfelt. He grew up Northern Ontario where one of fondest memories was as a 6 year old. In the summer, his family lived at the Port Carling dump and he learned to read from the comic books that the rich tourist kids threw out in the trash. He took advantage of all opportunities that he could and excelled, but not without facing extreme poverty, racism (as a member of the

Mnjikaning First Nation) and skepticism. His was a great story.

Closing Thoughts:

In looking back over my notes, scrawls and to-dos from the IFLA Conference, I am struck by the wealth of information I garnered in a week. Of course, there is the rest of the story – conversations over coffee, beers and dinners, catching up with colleagues one sees rarely, listening to good music in the lovely parks of Quebec, etc. But it's the ideas, the projects and the visions people share that are most notable. There is much shared ground in the world's libraries. Perhaps because I was so focused on copyright and management issues that this became clear. Too often, I am locked into an American perspective and it was good to have that jolted. We enjoy Fair Use and information in the public domain in ways that others do not. But others work within contexts unique to their history and information culture.

As we begin to focus on international aspects of open access this year, I again am struck by the variety of meanings that phrase has to our Science and Technology Committee members. Our Russian colleague gained new understanding of the concept by sitting in on an inter-library loan round table discussion one lunch. Our Chinese colleague reminds us to be pragmatic and look at solutions. Yet we all share a commitment to making science accessible to our numerous audiences.

It is a struggle to maintain the interest generated at the annual conference throughout the year. Our Committee president, Jill Mayer, is doing a good job of keeping us informed and asking for help. We have sent out the call for papers (<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla75/call-papers-en.htm>) for next year's conference in Milan August 23-27. In the meantime, we will explore the permutations of open access globally.



Courtesy of Ray Schwartz