

Conference report: IFLA Gothenburg 2010



HUI-YUN SUNG attended the World Library and Information Congress: 76th IFLA General Conference and Assembly; here she reports on her experience of the IFLA conference.

IFLA has been the conference that I planned to attend since I was an undergraduate in Library and Information Science in Taiwan. After 7 years, I finally managed to attend this prestigious conference.

Libraries are essential providers of information. To promote the equitable access to information, this year's theme for the IFLA conference was: 'Open access to knowledge – promoting sustainable progress'.

Opening Session

The opening session was very impressive, with keynote speeches delivered by Ellen R. Tise (IFLA president), Jan Eliasson (former President of the United Nation General Assembly), and Agneta Olsson (Chair of the 2010 WLIC National Committee). Agneta reported that there were 3330 delegates, from 128 countries, with more than 300 papers and approximately 200 posters presented at IFLA 2010. Jan ended his speech by saying "Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something, and you [librarians] are doing a lot." Afterwards a band performed some Abba songs. Every delegate stood up, waved hands and danced with the music. The atmosphere was so good and exciting.

Newcomers' session

This session was designed for those who attended the IFLA conference for the first time. Several IFLA activists were invited to share their experiences of being involved in IFLA with first timers, focusing on both the organisation and the conference. We were encouraged to become active in IFLA through volunteering, attending regional activities, participating in sessions of our interests, presenting papers at the next conference and joining IFLA network, i.e. participating through Facebook, Twitter, Flickr or blogging.

As a library lover, I was inspired to become active in IFLA through all sorts of methods. I realised that attending this conference provided me with a professional and social opportunity. This was international networking. Not only did I enjoy a world library experience, I also met academics and library practitioners from all over the world.

User-drive library innovation

IFLA is a big and complex organisation. There are 5 divisions, 45 sections and 12 special interest groups. IFLA's annual conference is a prestigious one in librarianship. There were 159 sessions throughout the whole conference, including parallel meetings, this year. 159 sessions were divided into 5 sub-themes: Open access and digital resources; Policy, strategy and advocacy; Users driving access and services; Tools and techniques; ideas, innovations, anticipating the new. Among them, I was particularly interested in users driving access and services in metropolitan libraries with public libraries.

My research interests are located in community engagement and public libraries. In the midst of economic recession, there were many innovative projects, with regard to engaging with local communities, going on around the world. Attending this conference was a very good opportunity to keep myself updated.

I learnt different stories from Denmark, Singapore, Australia, USA, Canada and Ukraine about how they had informed and involved local communities through user-drive library innovation. Aarhus Public Library, Denmark, transformed their library services through partnership working and carrying out collaboration work with users in the planning of new library building. Seeing the opportunity of digitalisation, National Library Board, Singapore made use of visual engagement to promote two reading programmes with young people. With limited resources, Ukrainian library system compared three case studies and suggested that library innovation be carried out through friendly competition, learning by doing and breaking through isolation.

In addition, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grantees demonstrated the importance of using impact evidence for advocacy through role play and discussions. I recalled that John Holden delivered a keynote speech at the Libraries Change Lives Conference and Award 2010 and he argued that libraries sent confused messages about the value of the services they provided and struggled to make a clear case for support. Indeed, under the threat of a credit crunch, how libraries can use the evidence of their impact to advocate their services has become a very important topic. To this point, the IFLA conference serves UK public libraries well – providing a very good opportunity to share and learn good practices from around the world.

Poster sessions

One of my main tasks was to communicate my research with academics and library practitioners from all over the world. Through presenting a poster at the conference, I got positive feedback and critical comments from those who came to see my poster. Some of them asked for further information about my research. Their interest in my research was a very good motivation for me to remain passionate and enthusiastic about my research.

Social events and cultural activities

I attended the Swedish lunch and OCLC Reception, which provided me with a good chance to network. I joined a tour at the Gothenburg City Library, which I found very lively, friendly and accommodating. I also enjoyed the Gothenburg Cultural Festival, where many concerts were held outside.

Follow up events

As soon as I returned back to England, I have been in touch with those people that I had met at the conference via email, whilst the memories were still fresh. I sent my poster and future information about my research to some of them. I also asked for further information about their library projects, such as Aarhus Public Libraries and National Library Board, Singapore. I believe those email correspondences will not only benefit my current research but also help with my future career.

Conclusions

I spent 5 days in Gothenburg, immersing myself in the informational tour, cultural activities and Swedish hospitality. There were many thought-provoking presentations, interesting posters and exciting discussions. I left the conference, inspired to develop more knowledge, become more active in IFLA and contribute more to the librarianship.

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