

**IFLA: World Library and Information Congress  
9-15 August 2010 Gothenburg, Sweden**

**and**

**IFLA Satellite Conferences**

My first IFLA experience was an unusual combination of the familiar and the completely unknown, and various degrees of familiarity in between these two extremes.

I attended the pre-conference “With the Right to Read” in Oslo on 7-9 August, a programme jointly sponsored by the Libraries Serving People with Print Disabilities, Library Services to People with Special Needs and the Literacy and Reading Sections. Whilst the subject matter of the conference was partially new to me, the location was not. In 2007, I spent a little over 5 months in Oslo completing the first semester of the International Masters in Digital Library Learning (DILL) programme. If someone had told me four years ago that I would visit Oslo twice in the space of three years, I would not have believed them. As much as Australians love to travel to Europe and the UK, Scandinavia doesn’t always make it on to the itinerary. And yet, there I was in Oslo...again! It was very much like going ‘home’ in many ways. I even met up with one of my DILL colleagues, albeit for only a short time.

The pre-conference centred on the question of equality of access for all - the right for everyone to access information which in many cases leads to active participation in their community and a greater level of independence. In many cases, this equality of access is dependent upon the information being available in the format of the person’s choice – whether that is large print or Braille for people who are blind or vision impaired, or in an audio format for those with disabilities such as dyslexia. Libraries can play a role in promoting equity of access by supporting and being aware of such initiatives as the P3 Resolution sustained by IFLA (where Publishers, Public Libraries and People (P3) can all work together to provide a better library service for people with print disabilities) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Key note speeches were given by Harald von Himelcrome, copyright advisor to the Danish Library Associations, Chairman of EBLIDA’s Expert Group on Information Law (EGIL) and member of the IFLA Committee on Copyright and other Legal Matters (CLM); and Honor Wilson-Fletcher, the Director of the National Year of Reading in England in 2008. The remainder of the day was devoted to real life examples of what librarians and their library community were doing to help improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and to enhance their access to information. They were all inspiring to say the least. All papers including the key notes presented at the Oslo pre-conference can be found here: <http://www.ifla.org/en/lsn/conferences>. The second day of the conference was devoted to DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) applications and explanations of its pertinence to people with disabilities. I was unable to stay for the entire day, as I was also invited as a recipient of an IFLA Travel Grant to attend “The Global Librarian”. This was another pre-conference satellite event organised by the IFLA New Professionals Special Interest Group and the Management of Library Associations Section being held in Borås the next day.

In Borås, my familiar / unknown dichotomy continued. Unlike my experience in Oslo, I had never visited Borås before, but upon arriving at the conference venue (the University of Borås), I spotted several familiar faces – professors and lecturers from my time in the DILL programme, another DILL student colleague and several Australian academics. It was also a time to meet colleagues with whom I’d had email contact with but had not yet met in person.

The Global Librarian was hosted by the Swedish School of Library and Information Science and had the themes of internationalisation of the LIS profession and how to become a global librarian. The day started with a bang, with Erik Boekjestein and Jaap van de Geer presenting highlights of their Shanachie Tour (<http://www.shanachietour.com/>) and their more recent venture, This Week in Libraries (<http://www.thisweekinlibraries.com/>). These two truly global librarians have travelled the world in search of examples of local best practice which they then share globally. Other presentations in the morning session included one by Dr. Petra Hauke and Michaela Jobb about supporting and encouraging students to become involved in their library association. It discussed the opportunities currently on offer, such as the IFLA Adopt a Student programme, the IFLA Student Paper Award and the BOBCATSSS annual symposium, which is completely organised by LIS students from eastern and western European universities (*note to self*: investigate opportunities for students in the Asia Pacific region to also be involved in the organisation of BOBCATSSS, then it would be a TRULY global event!).

Although there was much of interest in the first session after lunch, I chose to attend the Cooperation and Collaboration in Teaching and Research: Trends in LIS Education presentations, a joint initiative of the Swedish School of Library and Information Science; the IFLA Sections for Education and Training and Library Theory and Research; the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) and the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID). My Master thesis was also on the theme of LIS education, so I was interested to hear about some of the current projects from LIS educators around the world. The day ended with participants from the two satellite events joining forces for networking drinks, followed by the bus trip to Gothenburg in preparation for the 'main event'!

The IFLA World Library and Information Congress is much more than a conference with presentations delivered in various sections along different - but often times linked and similar - themes, as I was about to discover. The first session I attended was as an observer at the Standing Committee (SC) meeting of the Libraries Serving Persons with Print Disabilities (LPD) section. Broadly, the over-arching aim of this section is to increase the amount of information that is available in an accessible format - currently, less than 5% of all published material is available in an accessible format (such as Braille and audio). The SC is currently working on a number of recommendations from the final report of Phase One of the Global Accessible Library (GAL) project, including the merging of the Trusted Intermediary (TI) project (see [http://visionip.org/stakeholders/en/trusted\\_intermediaries.html](http://visionip.org/stakeholders/en/trusted_intermediaries.html) for further information about the TI project). Other SC meetings attended throughout the day included that of Information Literacy and the Africa, Asia & Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean Caucus meeting.

The official Opening Session of the Congress was held on Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> August. The keynote address given by Jan Eliasson, the former President of the United Nations General Assembly), was titled "The Power of the Word – Communication and Access to Information in a Globalized World" where he made references to his time as a diplomat and other personal experiences. After other official welcome speeches and musical interludes, the session closed with a replica of a great Swedish export. No, not IKEA or Volvo, but ABBA! The real ABBA came to my hometown when I was just five years old, and – apart from being considered far too young to attend a live concert – my parents could not afford to take me and my three brothers, so this was the closest thing I was ever going to get to the real deal. I was in paradise, and sang along as loudly as I could, right at the front.....!

The afternoon was spent at the Genealogy and Local History session, where I was impressed and amazed by the first presentation by Prof. Bruce Royner about the Virtual Hamilton Palace (<http://www.vhpt.org/>). Hamilton Palace – the ancestral home of the Dukes of Hamilton - was demolished 90 years ago, however the records kept of the palace including architectural drawings and the inventories of the artworks owned by the family were as such that the palace

has been able to be reconstructed virtually. In my opinion, this project epitomises what can be achieved when digital technology is applied to the cultural heritage sector - to be able to work on this project or one similar would be a dream come true for me! The full paper can be found here: <http://www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla76/73-royan-en.pdf>

The next three days (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) began with a plenary session each with an incredible speaker: the Swedish author Henning Mankell (<http://2010.ifla.org/videos/plenary-1>); Hans Rosling, Professor of International Health (<http://2010.ifla.org/videos/plenary-2>); and The Nobel Prize in Literature, Sture Allén (<http://2010.ifla.org/node/2430>). I urge you to watch each video, as the message of each speaker is inspiring to say the least and my comments here would not do any of them justice!

The afternoon of Friday 13<sup>th</sup> August was when I presented my paper in the Education and Training Section's session. This paper was based on the Master thesis that I wrote at Tallinn University in 2009 as the final component of the DILL programme. Again, I was familiar with presenting my research findings at a conference (although I would certainly not consider myself a veteran!), but I had never delivered a paper in front of such a large audience in such a large room! That was another completely new experience. Perhaps understandably, relief set in once I had finished - I was able to relax and enjoy the Asia Pacific cocktail party that night!

The vast array of IFLA Sections means there is always something interesting going on. If by some chance there is nothing that peaks your interest, there are the Poster Sessions or the Exhibition to explore. My one criticism however, would be that I felt the majority of presentations that I attended were not truly based on empirical research, which I thought would be the case. This could of course be the perception I gained due to the sessions I chose to attend – perhaps I missed the more research-based presentations, and I will be more experienced in being able to choose these sessions next time. However, overall, IFLA and the satellite pre-conference meetings was an incredible experience for me. As a recipient of a Travel Grant to assist with my costs associated with attending the conference, I would like to thank IFLA very much for making this experience a reality.

**Katherine Howard**  
Project Officer  
Royal Society for the Blind (RSB)  
Adelaide, Australia