

IFLA 2010 Experience, a Narrative Report on IFLA 2010 in Gothenburg, Sweden

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My journey to IFLA Gothenburg 2010, started March 16 when I was contacted by Sjoerd Koopman, Professional Programmes Director at IFLA, informing me that my application for a grant to attend the Congress was successful. Attending IFLA always seemed like a short-lived dream due to economic and other circumstances. So receiving this good news filled me with enthusiasm, and my ideas and expectations of this forthcoming experience reawakened. Since March 2010, to start of the IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Gothenburg, Sweden, from August 8 – 16th, the IFLA team represented by Josche Ouwerkerk, IFLA Conference Officer, informed the grantees of the arrangements made to facilitate their arrival in Sweden and details of the programme which included the satellite meeting “The Global Librarian” that happened in Boras, Sweden on 9 August.

Monday, August 9th | Satellite Conference, Boras | *The Global Librarian* | Day 1

On August 8th, 2010 I arrived at Landvetter airport, Gothenburg, and made the journey to the scenic city of Boras, where the satellite conference for the New Professionals Special Interest Group would convene on August 9, hosted by the Swedish School of Library and Information Science. I registered for the conference at 8:30 am. My views were that this conference, based on the themes and focus would expose me to the latest trends and best practices in library and information science, and the role of the new professional in leadership and services. The presentations and discussions were very informative. The opening keynote delivered by The Shanachies was very interesting...before I had seen this, I couldn't imagine the idea of doing a road trip to document the views of other people about libraries and interviewing librarians about the special work they are doing in terms of library services, the creation of a forum where professionals can unwind and express themselves. After this keynote session from 11:00 am – 12:00 I attended presentation c. *Doing the cross-over: new librarian's views from three countries: Barbados, Romania and Eastern Europe*. Barbados' Jessica Lewis' report of a survey describing the profile of the new librarian in the Caribbean region was especially interesting because I live and work in this region. I wasn't the least surprised by what Jessica had to say about the situation in the Caribbean with regards to low enrollment in library schools, shortage of professionally qualified librarians, gender disparity (more females than males), wage issues; majority of librarians reaching retirement over the next few years, training opportunities, etc. Hella Klausner, Network Expertise for Libraries International Cooperation also made a very interesting presentation, which was the first forum that I participated in where the presenter, presented via Skype, it real time and very focused on highlighting sources of information and resources for international work

experience. This was particularly useful, since I have studied in the United Kingdom (UK), via distance learning and I always wonder what the benefits could be for gaining work experience in the UK library environment. The closing keynote speaker, Pernille Drost, President of the Danish Union of Librarians, talked about the role of social media in networking for library professionals, raising the question ‘why go to conferences’. I disagreed with Drost in this regard because the technology to facilitate social media is not available to everyone and also there is the issue of cultural, educational, language and other communication barriers. I think that bringing people together, the person to person contact is important and significant so you can get the big picture, share the concerns of people from places where development is still in the early stages or not happening at all. My highlight of the Boras Conference was being interviewed by Federica Marangio, and then published as the Grantee in the Spotlight on IFLA’s website and the IFLA Express Issue 3. Overall the sessions were thought provoking and the hospitality of the hosts was great. It was a good start to IFLA 2010.

Tuesday, August 10th | Library Visits | Day 2

On Tuesday August 10th I booked a place on Library Visit 1 – Gothenburg City Library, while waiting I met two librarians from Jamaica, one a university professor and the other an information manager at a newspaper, for the first time, and they were doing Library Visit 13 – Tuve Library situated in Kulturpunkten Tuve-Säve, so I joined them. We travelled to the library by tram and bus and got to see the city harbour and other sites passing through to the outskirts. On arrival at Tuve Library we were greeted with drink refreshments (cool apple/orange juice) while listening to library personnel about services to the community. We received a tour of the facility and were treated to a performance of story telling and drama that is part of the activities for children. After the tour we sat with the staff of Tuve Library to a delicious Swedish lunch, a creamed salmon sandwich cake (layers of sandwich bread and creamed salmon spread, iced with the salmon cream filling and topped with lemon, cucumber, salmon slices and shrimp), lager and chocolate. During lunch each visiting delegate introduced themselves and talked briefly about their professional role. Coming from a special library environment, it was interesting for me to observe what happens in the public library which provides services to a wider community and different user groups. I didn’t regret making the switch, I saw first hand the wonderful work that libraries are doing to improve and integrate people into new communities in referring to the Red Cross language project. On return to the Swedish Exhibition and Congress Centre (SCC), I was hoping to take another tour but our group returned late and I missed the evening tours. I spent the afternoon doing a walking tour of the area outside the Congress centre and discovered the Nordstans shopping mall (coming from a small island where we don’t have mega-size shopping facilities...this was cool).

Wednesday, August 10th | Opening Ceremony | Newcomers Session | Day 3

The Opening Session stirred some emotions of happiness and pride for me. I felt proud to be a part of the assembly and it was almost dreamlike to sit there among the gathering of librarians from all over the world, especially when IFLA’s President Ms. Ellen Tise

announced that at the time of opening there were over 3500 registered delegates from 128 countries worldwide. The keynote delivered by Jan Eliasson, former President of the UN General Assembly and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, was very inspiring. Mr. Eliasson spoke about the globalisation of knowledge, with emphasis on the power of words, giving examples of his experiences as a UN negotiator in Africa, and how his upbringing has shaped his identity. After the opening keynote, the delegates were entertained by Swedish music performances with a band featuring Abba's greatest hits, the band encouraged the delegates to stand up and engage in dance. At that moment I wished the whole world could see this, to dispel the notion depicted by the media/film that librarians are introverted. Following the opening ceremony I enjoyed introducing myself and meeting other professionals at the President's lunch, despite embarrassing myself with the plate and glass holder (couldn't juggle them both). After lunch at 13:45 I attended the Newcomers Session where delegates were informed about the structure of IFLA and given tips and advice on coping with the conference. I had arrived while delegates were already seated and was told by a colleague that my photo was displayed on the projector (I was nervously worried if I looked flawless...humor). I was informed about the various activities of IFLA, and various awards/projects involving library students, I listened to the testimony of the situation in Haiti since the earthquake and details on what the Blue Shield is doing as part of the recovery effort and how delegates can volunteer. Unfortunately the session went over the scheduled time and I decided to visit the Exhibition. The exhibitors featured several interesting products and services, but I was expecting to see more exhibitors featuring library automation solutions, and also details on open access library automation solutions online.

Thursday-Saturday August 12th -14th | Congress Programme/Poster Session | Day 4-6

Thursday morning venue started with me attending the Plenary Session 8:30-9:15 titled "To be able to Read and Write – a Question of Dignity" delivered by Henning Mankell, Plenary Speaker, who raised the issue of illiteracy amongst youth in developing countries and his experience with youth in Africa, and how literacy could benefit an individual's quality of life. At 12:00 – 14:00 I attended the poster sessions where over 179 institutions and organizations featured their work and ongoing projects. I dealt with this by prioritising my interest and giving time to visit other posters in the closing days.

With the opening ceremony behind, it was now time to be present at sessions highlighted in the Congress Programme. I had some difficulty initially choosing the presentations I wanted to attend because of the programme structure where subject divisions for example Copyright, Knowledge Management, Literacy etc., had presentations occurring simultaneously. But despite this challenge I felt that I benefited from being a part of the sessions regardless. I learned about initiatives and ideas that were thought stimulating, and listening to the questions posed by delegates to the presenters and it was interesting to see everyone engaged in the response. In summary the sessions attended over the 3 days were on the subject of knowledge management and continuing professional development; online access to information with focus on dissemination, intranets, and legal issues; children and reading with focus on the Learn to read-read to learn @your library initiative in Jamaica, a partnership between the public and school libraries to cultivate life-long voluntary reading among youth on the island; update on initiatives,

projects, again the fundraising and voluntary work ongoing in Haiti to assist the restoration of heritage and other collections damaged by the January 2010 earthquake; the role of social media in libraries and its use as a driving force to connect library professionals and other professional groups; acquisitions and collection development etc. There were several other presentations that I considered to be interesting but as a new professional and also new to congress attendance in my field of work, there was vast information on initiatives, projects and ideas to grasp in the short space of time. I knew that when I returned home I would need to review papers and take a look at other presentations, for example environmental sustainability and libraries, session 135.

Sunday, August 15th | Congress Programme and Closing Session | Day 7

On the final day of the congress I was done in from the weeklong congress activities and experiencing Gothenburg city. I attended Session 149, Information technology, Cataloguing with Classification and Indexing with Knowledge Management. This session like others that I attended had some very technical presentations, and information on various projects was completely new to my knowledge, but I was satisfied with the knowledge imparted and professionalism of the presenters. The closing ceremony again reinstated the role of libraries in social development with regards to literacy and education. Awards were presented, the host Sweden, were commended for an excellent job in staging IFLA 2010, and after WLIC 2011 host, Puerto Rico, display a very enticing invitation video to the Congress venue in the capital San Juan.

Attending the Congress in person, and having face to face contact with other information professionals has reassured me the importance of my work and the role that libraries, museums and other information repositories play in education, and social development, worldwide. Also I have learned the various ways that emerging technologies can be used to connect libraries to their users. There are the times when I feel uncertain of my future in this career in the Caribbean region due to various circumstances and challenges as outlined by Jessica Lewis, UWI Barbados in her presentation in Boras. The lessons from IFLA teach that there is a forum to address these issues and collectively they can be resolved to a degree of satisfaction for all parties involved. I would have liked to see more sessions for the New Professionals with regards to career guidance and training. I was expecting to see CILIP, ALA and other major library associations with information desk providing details on membership, etc. (if they were present, I hope that I didn't fail to notice amid the activity).

I wish to thank the IFLA Committee responsible for making this opportunity a reality, and I will endeavour to use this experience as a basis on which to build my career and establish a presence in the librarianship community.

Thank you

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