

IFLA Grantee Narrative Report: Gwen Mar, Fiji

Getting to Sweden

The long flight consisting of over 21 hours of flying time did not dampen my spirits as I eagerly anticipated my first trip to Europe. I knew that if I ever got lost in any of the international airports that I was transiting, my travel companion and work colleague - Sharmila Pillay - would provide me company as two lost souls from the Pacific was less daunting than one lost soul.

I arrived into Gothenburg a few minutes before midnight and the last bus to the city, or Boras for that matter had long since departed. Wishing to save our Euros to stretch us throughout our stay in Sweden, rather than take a taxi to my accommodation, Sharmila and I opted to rest on one of the comfortable sofas on the first floor of Landvetter Airport. At the crack of dawn, I was eager to start my journey and caught the very first bus to Boras.

Boras

My first impression of Boras was of a quaint little sleepy town. Of course my room was not ready given my very early arrival. Putting my bags in the hotel storage, I ventured onto the cobblestoned sidewalks of the town. Into the park adjacent to the hotel I went taking numerous pictures of the vibrantly colorful flora. In no time did I adapt to the rainy welcome of Boras as my home town is on the rainier side of Fiji. Over the course of the day, I met up with a few grantees who had arrived the previous night and as our numbers increased, we explored the town centre, its many shops and accidentally located the University of Boras School of Library and Information Studies building.



Appreciating the colorful gardens in Boras



Boras' colorful landscaping



Posing with a few grantees before we headed to the University of Boras for the Global Librarian Satellite Meeting

Global Librarian Satellite Meeting

The opening presentation on the Shanachie Tour by Erik Boekesteijn and Jaap van de Geer was a great start to my attendance at the conference. It was very motivational and the videos aptly demonstrated what a few enthusiastic individuals are capable of accomplishing. The ideas and best practices shown, including the use of gaming toolkits for libraries was a big eye opener for one coming from an unknown developing country located in the vast pacific.

The next presentation by Jessica Lewis was a good contrast to the opening presentation. I was able to associate with the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats faced by next generation Caribbean academic librarians that she mentioned since I am also a next generation librarian, albeit from the pacific.

With the remaining presentations I was better able to understand the vital lifeline that libraries offer to the communities they serve. Libraries also act as barometers to the societies that they serve and mobile libraries, whether state of the art located in train stations or those laden on a donkey's back, offer an important service in accomplishing life-long learning.

IFLA Conference Highlights

1). Library Visits

I visited University West and Trollhattan Municipal Library as part of my organized library visit. I was mainly interested in the university library's system of liaison librarians, information literacy strategies and copyright-related services as these are some of the core tasks that I oversee in my position as reader services librarian at the University of the South Pacific Library.

Overall, I was impressed with the ambience and welcoming atmosphere of the libraries, the ergonomic furniture and the university library's well-stocked photocopying room.



Students studying in the university library



Inside University West's library



The children's section of Trollhattan Municipal Library



Creative librarians make reading interesting

During my spare time, I visited Gothenburg City library and was amazed at the inclusiveness of the teenagers section.



2). Opening Session

Beginning with the thought-provoking presentations by the President and the Chief Guest, followed by dancing and singing to the accompaniment of Sweden's most popular export, ABBA, professional discussion was smartly intertwined with entertainment.

3). Exhibitions

The exhibitions proved to be very educational and an alternative when I did not have a conference session that interested me to attend. The arena gave me an opportunity to learn more about the products and services offered by the various publishers, online databases and library management system vendors and other library-related organizations.



Busy exhibition venue during the opening night



Conference participants at the exhibition booths

4). Mobile Libraries



Enjoying the interior of a mobile library



Posing with my new-found friends from Namibia and Japan outside the new Kungsbacka book mobile

5). RSCAO Banquet

The banquet hosted by Emerald and the Regional Standing Committee on Asia and Oceania was a wonderful setting to meet up with my Supervisor, Doctor Dan Dorner, from my days as a student pursuing my masters at Victoria University of Wellington.



Grantees enjoying our cocktails



Fooling around at the Central Station

6). Sightseeing around Gothenburg

Gothenburg city had lots to offer in terms of sightseeing and I spent many wonderful hours exploring the markets, food stalls and taking in the street performances whilst soaking up the fine weather.

The local people were always helpful, friendly and approachable whenever I was lost or needed assistance.



Yummy Italian paella on offer at the market



All types of cheeses on sale



A rare hibiscus in a florist's shop



A street performer keeps the crowd captivated

My Gratitude and Deepest Appreciation

As I come to a conclusion in my narrative report about my attendance at the 76th IFLA World Library and Information Congress, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my sponsors and everyone who have made my trip possible.

The trip has proved to be an eye-opener on the possibilities that can be achieved as well as inspiring success stories. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in Sweden and take with me the infinitely happy memories that I will cherish forever. I have made many global friends and my professional network continues to grow and flourish.

With warmest wishes

Gwen Mar