

# IFLA World Library and Information Congress

**Columbus, Ohio, USA: 13-19 August 2016**

While Rio de Janeiro played host to 206 countries competing in the 2016 Olympics this August, Columbus Ohio, USA hosted the "Library Olympics" with almost 4,000 librarians and information specialists from 137 countries at IFLA's World Library and Information Congress (WLIC). I was recipient of the American Library Association 2016 WLIC Fellowship and was in Columbus for six days of learning, discussions and networking with over 200 meetings, workshops, presentations, parallel and poster sessions from which to choose.

I had understood that WLIC was a prodigious event but it was truly awe inspiring to enter an arena with a couple of thousand librarians. The diversity of the audience means that there are seven official languages and an army of translators and volunteers to ensure that the event runs smoothly and everyone is orientated effectively.



One of the biggest challenges when attending WLIC is planning your schedule. My approach was to rise early, pack a lot in and try to attend at least one session per day that was outside my sectoral interests. With so many diverse topics on offer, this was easy to achieve. The orientation session for WLIC first timers was really useful and provided advice on scheduling as well as the important social and networking aspects of IFLA.

This year's WLIC theme was "Connections, Collaboration, Community," and these concepts featured heavily in many of the conference sessions.

Because libraries are essential to global development, IFLA was instrumental in getting "access to information" included as part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations to be achieved by 2030. Sustainable Development Target 16.10 is to "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements." The 2030 Agenda is a global plan of action for people, the planet, and prosperity and unsurprisingly it featured in many of the sessions at WLIC 2016.

Library designs that embrace the community was a theme of a session entitled "What Comes After the 'Third Place'? Visionary Libraries—Space and Users" discussing the library as both the third place and as a community gathering point that is vibrant and changes according to user's needs.

Service to immigrant populations is an increasingly important part of the library's mission, as refugees or displaced persons are relocated around the world. Many sessions outlined approaches to the provision of library services to migrant global populations, newcomers and refugees. I particularly enjoyed a session on a library project in the Netherlands that provides family literacy services to newly arrived families in their own homes.

Larger conference sessions and plenary sessions were complemented by smaller



scale workshops that gave participants the opportunity to contextualize issues. One such session was a round table workshop on Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning.

Poster sessions gave a flavour of the many replicable initiatives from around the world. I was interested in participatory projects in libraries, the growth and shift of the maker movement and the harnessing of the open online education phenomenon.

While I tried to attend a diverse range of sessions, some of my colleagues on the ALA WLIC Fellowship Programme were academic and special librarians and during our get-togethers they briefed me on the sessions they attended on issues such as Copyright, Disaster Planning, theft and Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE).

One of the highlights of WLIC was networking with librarians I met between sessions. When else do you get the opportunity to discuss community engagement with a librarian from Alaska, preservation with a librarian from Jamaica and indigenous communities with a librarian from New Zealand?

Just like the Olympics has its village, WLIC had its cultural activities. These included an opening ceremony with as much razzmatazz as any Broadway show and a spectacular American themed cultural night in the Center of Science and Industry. Our national flag was also flying high at the very convivial Irish Caucus in Columbus.

In conclusion, WLIC provided an unparalleled professional development opportunity, the exposure to innovation and a reaffirmation of the power of libraries and librarians to be a positive force for good on a global scale.

Conference proceedings are available to view at <http://library.ifla.org/view/conferences/2016/>

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