

IFLA 2010: Itinerary Report

By Magdalena Biota (Argentina)

**SATELLITE MEETING: THE GLOBAL LIBRARIAN, BORÅS, 9 AUGUST
2010**

I start to draft this report on my experiences and opinions about IFLA WLIC 2010 on Monday 9 August 2010 at Gothenburg (or Göteborg, in Svenska), just arrived from the generous Borås, still with the scent of the Global Librarian Satellite Meeting lingering on my skin. A drums player encompasses my words. I feel the movement of the drums, a gust of vibrating air coming through the open window and making me feel energetic, just as energetic as I felt during the day, when the rhythmic beats of the bouncy and intense experience of The Global Librarian struck a chord of enthusiasm and interest in me.

The Satellite Meeting dealt with issues such as connecting libraries and librarians by means of new technologies and networking, with an especial emphasis on internationalization of new professionals' careers. In Petra Hauke's words: "Once two people have connected, there's no way to know how far they can go". By getting in contact with people from other parts of the world one can gain insight as to how similar problems are tackled in libraries abroad. Understanding is broadened. One is invited to rethink and reconsider, and might come up with a more comprehensive and more creative solution. Both the individual and the institution benefit from the interchange.

The positive aspects of such interchange were further highlighted by the Sanachie Tour. Aiming at "preserving the good and building the best by sharing best library practice with librarians worldwide", the Sanachie Tour was enlightening and extremely motivating. With their refreshing opening keynote, Erik Boekjestein and Jaap Van der Geer helped to stimulate ideas on what a library can look like. Their tales comprised the human and the technological element in libraries to bring about a highly creative and thought-provoking presentation.

As seen through the Sanachie's eyes, libraries are sources of leisure and enjoyment, places full of surprises and fun where the librarian plays a fundamental role in ensuring access to information, knowledge and new technologies. Challenging the stereotypes of librarians as dull and uninspiring, the Sanachie interviewed Paul Holdengräber, the Director of the New York Public Library's Public Program Series. Advocating for both information and inspiration, Holdengräber thinks librarians should help people think "it's sexy to think". In setting books free and contributing to the excitement of thinking, librarians encourage people to have thoughts, and "to have a thought is a caress to our brains".

Another of the things that amazed me of the Sanachie Tour was their uses of games, by means of which they promoted the sharing of ideas. Spin the library bottle was the most outstanding example. The visual impact of watching a group of adults around a circle led me to think about the value of some old traditions that have been lost except as borderline experiences such as the Sanachies', who, by the way, are named after the traditional medieval Irish storytellers. Sharing stories in a circle reminded me of the importance of old knowledge-sharing practices before the dissemination of writing. Nowadays Western societies benefit from a wide range of media to gain knowledge, though sometimes knowledge, and especially the value attached to certain knowledge by a given community, results from some mysterious synergy between people, as in the old times of ritual or liturgical gathering.

79TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE, GOTHENBURG, 10-15 AUGUST 2010

On Tuesday 10 my first WLIC experience as a newcomer was attending the Cataloguing Section Standing Committee in its 76th meeting (Session 12). Being first timer at IFLA, I thought it would be great idea to attend as many sessions as time would allow, so I was happy to wake up early and be on time to learn how IFLA's members work and discuss issues relating to their areas of expertise. I was disappointed to find, though, that it was hard to me to follow their discussion in detail, and despite working as a cataloger in my present position, most of the specificities on the subject were obscure to me, stirring my curiosity. However, I did get a clear input on the way sections work at IFLA, combining a bottom-up to a top-down approach. This input was confirmed by my experience at other sessions, especially by a very intense one at Session 96, in which, after a round of presentations, all the attending delegates were invited to brainstorm in groups, each leaded by one lecturer, who later shared that brainstorming with all the groups.

After this first session, I took my library visit to **The Röhsska Museum of Design and Decorative Arts**, which showed its collection of manuscripts and rare books, and hold an exhibition Contemporary Nordic Bookbinding.



Collection of manuscripts and rare books at The Röhsska Museum

On my way back to the Congress venue, I dropped by one of the most fascinating libraries I have ever seen: the **Stadsbiblioteket i Göteborg**, or **Gothenburg City Library**, vividly inhabited by readers and users, who freely ramble around its generous shelves and leisurely read books, listen to music, surf on the net, or simple gather around a table to discuss topics, share ideas, interchange world-views, and entertain. Visitors benefit from access to a wide range of books, CDs, movies, newspapers and magazines from all over the world, video games, talking books and audio books, and the highest technology, in a most appealing environment.



Poseidon Statute, by Carl Milles

On the left, the Stadsbiblioteket i Göteborg, or Gothenburg City Library

Breathing from this atmosphere, I set myself to stroll along the library aisles and by utter chance found a talking book by Juan Rulfo—quite a treasure to me—recorded in his voice. Juan Rulfo, a Mexican writer of the mid 20th century, author to books like *El llano el llamas* and *Pedro Páramo*, was one of my favourite and most inspiring writers when I was in college (and beyond). Thrilled though I was, I managed to control my passion and, regaining reason, I learnt that Rulfo's downloadable talking book, as many others in the library's collection, aim primarily at ensuring access to literature for the visually impaired.

I could also learn that, apart from talking books, the section devoted to help people who, for various reasons, find it difficult to read or write consists of other accessible media, equipped reading and writing stations, computers, Braille facilities, aids and qualified librarians who offer training courses for free. Another target for these media and services are foreign language students, who benefit from all these new technologies to enhance their skills. They can, for example, use a computer program which both recognises spoken words by approximation and reads, at different speed rates, a scanned text on the spot. Some of the gadgets in this section can also be borrowed by users.



The City Library

Gothenburg City Library combines high-tech and innovative facilities with the most lively environment. Library users can benefit from self-service, as all media is tagged with RFID chip. This includes self check-out/in and an audioindex, which consists of a synthesised voice that reads out the title, author, and a summary of the content. Other services include discussing groups on local and regional politics, counselling for entrepreneurs, mobile libraries, and social media.

In my spontaneous itinerary of the day, I also visited the **Göteborgs Konsthall**, or **Gothenburg Art Museum**, where I could contemplate works by Nordic artists alongside Monet, van Gogh, Rembrandt and Picasso. Lost in a timeless path, I was hooked by famous Romantic and Renaissance paintings, while learning about fascinating Swedish artists like Carl Kylberg (1878-1952) and Ivar Arosenius (1878-1909).



Carl Klyberg, *Homecoming* (1938)

Once outside, I joined a multitude at the Culture Festival. Streets were vibrantly crowded by people dancing and listening to music in the warm summer afternoon. By

the end of the day, I had been to many interesting places, and was exhausted; yet before coming back to the hotel, I joined a group of librarians at the IFLA Night Spot.



Gothenburg streets during the Festival

On Wednesday 11 I visited the **Ekonomiska Biblioteket**, or **Economics Library**. Not only did I benefit from an improvised guided tour of the library carried out by a very kind and attentive librarian who showed me the collection and facilities (which include several study rooms for the students) but also I rambled around the **School of Business, Economics and Law**, silently observing its inner life, peeping into its luminous rooms, passing by students who, deep in thought, sat in desks along the corridors, groups of school mates pleasantly engaged in conversation. Different though it may seem from my school environment at state-funded University in La Plata, especially in its tidiness, the ramble stroke a chord of nostalgia, which was reinforced by my visit to the **Undergraduate and Newspapers Library**, just opposite, where I sat by a window and glanced through a book on European history, chosen by chance from one of the shelves.



Undergraduate and Newspapers Library

After the visits, I attended the **Opening Session** and the **IFLA President's lunch** and met colleagues from many parts of the world. I also attended the **Newcomers session**, and was engaged in stimulating conversations with many librarians at the **Exhibition opening**. I met again Jonathan Hernández, a Mexican librarian from UNAM, whom I had met the day before at **The Röhsska Museum**. Encouraged by the Newcomers session's spirit, Jonathan and I set to the task of meeting at least ten librarians a day, which was really fun!

By a happy chance, I bumped into Nancy Digiácomo at the **Poster presentations**. I was very pleased to learn that she is the Director of the Municipal libraries in Avellaneda, my hometown.

On leaving the Congress venue, I met Jonathan Hernández again and we rambled around the city, towards the port, where we had a drink in a bar while we shared library experiences, engaging ourselves in an animated discussion on differences and similarities from our libraries. Soon it was already growing dusk, so we decided to leave. Later at the Night Spot I still had a chance of learning more about librarians worldwide.



Jonathan (Mexico), Charles (Cameroon), and Magdalena (Argentina)
African and Latin American librarians at the Night Spot

On Thursday 12 I attended Henning Mankell's **plenary session**: "To be able to read and write: a question of dignity". Later I joined **Session 87** where I could learn about some Global Development Programs that aim at bridging the digital divide in countries such as Chile and Latvia. Pilar Pachecho and Kristine Paberza's "Advocacy for sustainable public computer access programs: using evidence of library impact on users" was highly relevant for some local and municipal libraries in my country. The information gathered proved to be of interest to the Argentinean colleague I had met the day before, Nancy Digiácomo, with whom I shared some of my insights on the presentation.

Later I met Petra Hauke at the poster sessions. I was lucky to find her to tell her that I was wondering if a mentoring program for new professionals, similar to Adopt-a-Student, could be implemented to address librarians who have finished their studies but have recently joined the global librarians community. She suggested me to contact Sebastian Wilke of NPSIG.

In the afternoon, I joined **Session 96: Law Libraries, Government Libraries, and government information and official publications**, which was very interested as it enabled delegates to participate in a discussion after a first round of presentations. After this, we were invited to a reception at the **Central Library**.

When the reception was over I set myself to stroll around new areas of the city. By chance I met a Turkish colleague who joined me. We went sightseeing and discussing politics and contemporary history. She is a sociologist, so her views were very attractive to me, and I could learn how of the most prominent politicians and local figures were seen by someone who studied and lives in a country very far from mine.

On Friday 13 I attended Hans Rosling's **plenary session**: "A fact based world view". Despite his at times offensive humour, I was astounded by the speaker's ability of using facts, figures and other resources to make a point. The presentation was truly impressive.

The next session I attended was **Session 105: Government Libraries, GIOPS, Knowledge Management, Preservation and Conservation and Law Libraries**. I was very interested in Barber's presentation on Argentina's National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons, but I learnt she could not make it to the Congress.

At that Session I met Antonio, one of IFLA's interpreters, who comes from Spain and was glad to learn I was a Spanish-speaking translator. He introduced me to the group of translators at *IFLA Express* and showed me a very useful interactive on-line dictionary in which he is currently working (<http://eubd1.ugr.es/>).

That afternoon I visited Tjolöholm Castle, enjoyed the landscape, learnt about the arts and crafts movement in England, and had a delicious coffee and cake at what used to be the workers' gathering place. I also had the chance to visit the Church that was built for the workers within the castle's premises. Once back at the Congress I attended some of **Session 122**, and was astonished at some of the evidence presented on censorship in the digital age.



In front of Tjolöholm's Church

That night was the Night Dance, and by IFLA's grace I met my mentor! I thanked her, the Argentine librarian that posted the announcement of the IFLA Grant. I really enjoyed the party, it was really fun. Later the team of IFLA interpreters and translators invited me to join them in a bar.



Wild dancing librarians

On Saturday 14, I attended **Session 136: Library History SIG** and **Session 140: FAIFE with Information Technology**. Later in the afternoon, I joined the storytelling get-together, connecting myself with children's world and orally transmitted experiences. Storytelling is a skill in action that is lost if not actualised; with this in mind I met Claudia, the librarian who had prompted the activity, at the Hallway of F rooms, as announced, just next to the Swedish Library Arena, where we soon afterwards gathered.

Around a table, in a friendly atmosphere, a group of people from many parts of the world sat relaxedly, yet eager to listen to the stories each of one had to tell. It was Claudia who broke the ice with a very colourful story set in a far-away forest so vividly described that we could even feel its humidity while almost imperceptible raindrops fell down over us. After her, a colleague from Brazil entertained us with an amusing story full of animals and onomatopoeias. Now the setting was a farm, in agricultural Brazil, and we all set our minds free to imagine a landscape perhaps quite different from that of one's own countries'. Three young librarians from Netherlands told us many stories on St. Nicholas, highlighting the importance of these tales to the children in their communities. We could even hear them sing their songs from childhood in Dutch, which was truly emotive. Every story took us to some imaginary landscape of childhood, either actually seen in the past, or described, or read, or created by one's own experiences back then. By this time, the Swedish Library Arena had closed, and we moved to the park opposite the Congress venue.

In the park we still had time to share more stories from all over the world. Feeling comfortable enough, we even shared some personal, intimate experiences. Also social and political issues aroused. We learnt that in some regions same stories are chanted by different communities, though slightly changed, and each community claims to be the owner of the "true" version. Discussions and riots may come up as a result of this, which led us to ponder on who-owns-it issues, such as those presented the day that followed by Ismail Abdullahi, who quoted: "Nobody owns the story, it's the story who owns us", to which we would add: "as long as one is capable of enjoying it". The closing story was Claudia's. And this time she guided us to the arid lands of Arabia, where elephants always have something beautifully wise to say. To wrap up our child-world immersion, we visited Liseberg Park. For free. And in real-time. Though I guess all the fantasies stirred during the afternoon hovered sweetly around us for quite a while.

On Sunday 15, I attended **Session 152: LIS Education in Development Countries SIG**, on educating LIS students in orally shaped communities, which was very interesting and stimulating, especially Ismail Abdullahi's presentation. Later, I met many of the people I had met during the IFLA WLIC at an emotive **closing ceremony**.



IFLA Grantees at IHM Hotel (Göteborg)