

CILIP Scotland Conference Report 2017

Introduction

I decided to attend one of the CILIP Scotland Conference days as I viewed this as a great opportunity to further my personal development as well as prepare for CILIP Chartership which I hope to commence in 2018. This year's annual CILIP Scotland conference took place on Monday 5th and Tuesday 6th June 2017 at the Apex Hotel in Dundee. The conference was called, Strategies for Success; where all talks/ discussions were viewed as, as declared by CILIP Scotland President Liz McGettigan, being visionary, filled with ideas, and practical, meaning that they could be applied and tailored to each delegate's individual workplaces. The conference consisted of a mix of keynote speakers and parallel sessions as well as key networking opportunities during breaks and lunch!

I was particularly interested in any talks relating to the future of libraries, in particular academic libraries, and new ways of gaining customer feedback. Therefore, I chose to attend Monday's conference day since it seemed like the day's contents would be more relevant to my academic library background and as well as my own personal library interests. In this report, I will discuss the keynote talks and parallel sessions that I found to be the most beneficial to my role as IS Assistant at the University of Strathclyde.

Current and Future Trends Affecting Libraries

The first keynote speaker was Miguel Figueroa, Director of the American Library Association Center for the Future of Libraries based in the U.S.A, who identified and examined trends happening in our society and how best to creatively tackle these through our limited resources. He discussed key changes that have recently affected libraries. The first being the move towards 'Interest Driven Education', a type of education which is not solely confined to a classroom but rather spills out into all sorts of alternative spaces. There is also a demographic of the population who can be seen to fit into a category of 'Emerging Adulthood', where those in their late teens to late twenties are taking longer to complete specific 'life goals' compared with earlier generations. Miguel drew on American libraries reliance on funding which is largely met by citizens paying their taxation charges. He therefore argued that it is within the interests of libraries to cater for this new demographic in order to assist them with obtaining employment thereby contributing to library funding.

Miguel explained that by looking out with the confines of the library to other sectors helps draw on similar parallels which we can then learn from. He drew on the emerging trend of 'Fast Casual Restaurants', which have elements of both sit down and fast food restaurants. He highlighted examples of customers using mobile apps to make choices and payments of their food, and having spaces with which to access Wi-Fi. Miguel argued that we should draw on these ideas whilst also being mindful of their ulterior motives; obtaining payment for their services and gaining information about their customers. This, he purports, pushes against the aim of libraries as being an impartial place for all members of a community. I

agree that it is this neutrality, enhancement of education, and community cohesion that separates libraries from retail outlets.

Technology, Miguel continued to argue, continues to be a large driving force impacting on our society; the number of devices is predicted to grow from 30 billion to 212 billion by 2020. In order to anticipate this future change libraries must look at integrating their services into these devices. I found this interesting to reflect upon, as more and more people are buying into what Miguel terms as a ‘Sharing Economy’, a concept where many services, such as ‘Uber taxis’ or ‘Air b n b’, are available to people to access from the convenience of their devices anywhere, anytime. I agree that libraries should learn from this concept by looking at innovative ways of incorporating technology to make their services more accessible.

I also found Miguel’s example of people currently reading less in our society as an interesting trend, I believe this may be because there are too many technological distractions, like our love of the smart phone, which take people away from reading a book and the focus involved in this. It was interesting to hear of an innovative concept which originated in France that has anticipated this trend. A dispenser called ‘Short Edition’ was created; essentially a machine which prints out free short stories for customers on till receipt paper. The short stories vary in reading time length, 3 minutes, 5 minutes, or 10 minutes. Working in a university library myself, I could see ‘Short Edition’ as being a novel way for students to relax/unwind during their studies. Miguel also highlighted a similar idea to encourage reading; a specific App now enables people to read small chunks of a novel over a specific time period by feeding bite size sections of the novel to the reader each day.

Miguel summed up his presentation by advocating that we as Library and Information Professionals are best placed to deal with internal and external changes that happen since our collective values, including widespread access to information and the diversity of ideas, can align with new and emerging societal trends.



Re-imagining the Space of Heriot Watt University Library

Following on from this, I was particularly interested to hear from Wendy Pirie, Head of Academic and Learner Services at Heriot Watt University, on the large scale project which was implemented at Heriot Watt to increase and re-create learner spaces partly through the reduction in redundant stock. I became familiar with the term ‘Learning Commons’, which is generally referred to as a separate part of the library situated away from the library collection which focuses on digital/electronic resources and the layout of space to maximise learner experience. Her session charted her work on the project in which working as a team she assessed the current trends: libraries are no longer fixed spaces i.e. they are areas of ‘learning activity’ where there are silent/quiet areas to other areas where there are varying

noise levels to promote group discussion; students are using physical books less and referring to other ways of learning online; and there has also been an increase in learners who are not always local to the university library, but access its services remotely. It was interesting to note the different usage levels of their university library from largely being a place for stock/resources from its origins, catering for 1500 students, to seeing this number increase markedly to 9000 students as well as now accommodating 24 hour opening. The idea of learner spaces seems a current theme for academic libraries as evidenced in Wendy's presentation, with a move away from traditional library environments to new innovative and creative learning environments.

Wendy imparted a number of tips for the strategic organisation of this project, including the importance of obtaining the input of a range of stakeholders, including academic staff, students, other academic libraries, and an outside consultancy firm, to obtain an objective perspective on how best to re-create the learning environment. This resulted in incorporating multi-purpose soft seating areas as well as essentials such as Wi-Fi access, plug points, movable tables, and plasma TV screens.

Lunchtime provided delegates with the opportunity for further networking as well as a fantastic 3 course meal, including the Apex Hotel's signatory mascot, a duck, in chocolate form! Once we were all fed we continued onto the second parallel session.



Exploring the use of UX Techniques in Academic Libraries

Having attempted to gain user feedback from the students at Strathclyde University on their common Microsoft Word issues, I was particularly interested in exploring the upcoming concept of 'UX Techniques' for a more direct, in-depth research technique. The session, held by Leo Appleton from Goldsmiths University of London, did not disappoint. Leo shared his findings of applying UX techniques from his previous position at University Arts London, as an ideal means of obtaining feedback from student customers. User Experience is an ethnographic approach using observation techniques to explore the environment and behaviours of those being studied. Again, the overall theme of attending the first day of the conference seemed to be about 'library space', since this was the one of the main reasons for the application of this type of research in University Arts London. Using students, due to the availability of funding, as 'Volunteer Field Researchers' gave the research that added meaning and impartiality. The key to the success of this was investing in properly training the Student Field Researchers in preparation for their role.

Three pivotal UX techniques were implemented: mapping, having an observers stand in different places within the library at different times of the day and mapping each student's route, whom they encounter, using a pen and floor plan of the library; static observations, observers sit in a specific area of the library and take notes over a period of time on what they see; and touchstone tours, involve observers approaching a library user and asking the

user to guide them around their ‘own’ library, explaining what they do where. This was followed up by a focus group involving the Field Researchers sharing their views on their experiences of carrying out this ethnographic research. To encourage discussion, ice breaker techniques were used such as ‘Love Letters’ and ‘Break Up Letters’, encouraging each participant to address their academic library in letter form outlining the positives and negatives of their participation. The student volunteers were also used to assist in analysing the results. I gained a real insight into the importance placed upon engaging much more with students to achieve better results, it made the students feel more involved in a service they used often and enhanced the reputation of the library. It seemed that an added benefit of this was using this project as evidence towards their Customer Excellence Award. Leo explained that through the initial incremental changes, such as improving signage to help guide students to the most direct routes, they were also able to demonstrate evidence which helped to influence management decisions.

Inspirational talk on Libraries by Crime Writer, Val McDermid

The highlight of the whole day was the final keynote speaker, renowned Crime Writer, Val McDermid, who summed up the pivotal part Library and Information Professionals play by enabling individuals’ opportunities they might not otherwise have had. Val used herself as a prime example of this, citing public libraries as the reason she was able to progress upwards from a working class background to Oxford University to read English and subsequently in becoming a Writer. Books, she explained, opened up a whole new world to her; they gave her ideas as well as learning that there was indeed such a profession as a Writer, giving her the impetus to pursue this career. I was really bowled over by her passion for libraries, especially her belief that public libraries are just as relevant to society today as they were when she was growing up, albeit for different reasons such as Internet use, researching local history, and book groups. Val came across as an avid campaigner against the closure of public libraries, as it is libraries, she insisted, that offer those from under privileged backgrounds opportunities to break away from their environment.

Val made the interesting point that a society without libraries would mean that people would grow up with a narrowed view of the world in which they live. She worries that individuals in our society are becoming more and more selective in what resources they choose to educate themselves with, with there being less independent choice of reading a book which they might not otherwise have read, which might have broadened their horizons. She supports a future where there are more opportunities available for working class girls like her in achieving their dreams.

Val's speech heralded the close of the first day of the conference which was fitting as her talk encapsulated the role of our profession in enabling access to information and practising equality of opportunity to enable a cohesive and inclusive community. I found her talk inspirational. I also gained a great deal from the other talks by learning about best practice from other libraries. I found it worthwhile networking with other Library and Information professionals throughout the UK who shared my passion about the profession and I hope to

continue

this



involvement in the future.