



Let's work together, let's library

World Library and Information Congress
88th IFLA General Conference and Assembly
21-25 August 2023, the Netherlands

Report by Anaïs Cayzac, school librarian for Glasgow life and CILIPS member.

I was incredibly fortunate to receive a bursary from CILIPS to attend the IFLA WLIC conference in Rotterdam. In addition, I was selected by the IFLA organizers to be part of the volunteer team, working daily to ensure the conference ran smoothly. After my shifts, I had the opportunity to attend conference sessions. This year's theme was "Let's work together, let's library," which explored how libraries can contribute to an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to participate. Key topics included personal development, promoting reading, language and digital skills development, free access to culture, digital knowledge, and innovation. IFLA brought together 3,000 attendees from over 150 countries and 350 volunteers, making it an enriching and memorable experience.

Day 0- Volunteers:

On Saturday, the 20th, all volunteers assembled to get to know the venue, undergo training, and receive instructions regarding our tasks and shifts for the congress.



Day 1 highlights:

The opening ceremony of the IFLA World Library and Information Congress was grand, attended by 3000 delegates from around the globe. Distinguished speakers, including Rotterdam's Vice Mayor Alderman Said Kasmi, IFLA President Barbara Lison, and Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science Robbert Dijkgraaf, graced the event with their presence. Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands also honored the ceremony with her attendance.

The ceremony also marked the recognition of the Biblioteca Gabriel García Márquez in Barcelona, Spain, as the best new public library of the year, highlighting excellence in library design and innovation.

In a heart warming display of solidarity and love for literature, over 200 librarians from various countries participated in a flash mob at Rotterdam Central Station, reading out children's books to spread joy and promote literacy.

Additionally, the WLIC 2023 Exhibition opened at the Rotterdam Ahoy Convention Centre, hosting over 65 organizations presenting their products and services throughout the week, alongside the IFLA and WLIC 2024 booths.

Day 2 highlights:

On that day, over 50 parallel sessions were conducted, covering a wide range of topics and discussions.

Poster Exhibition: Nearly 200 posters were showcased in the Poster Session, where presenters enthusiastically shared their work and insights over two-hour sessions across Tuesday and Wednesday.



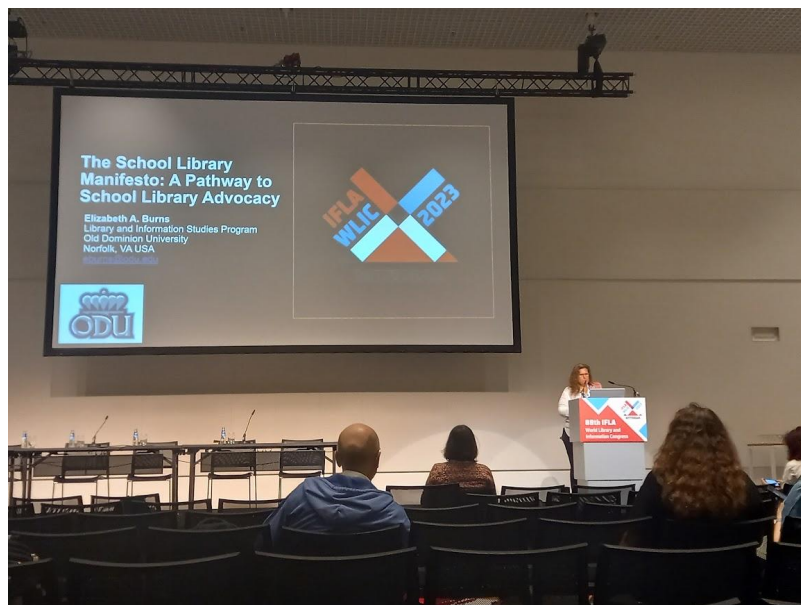
Marketing Campaigns Session: The "Around the World in 7 Marketing Campaigns" session celebrated innovative library projects globally, each recognized by the prestigious 2023 IFLA PressReader International Marketing Award. Projects highlighted included initiatives like the "Around the World in 26 Libraries" program from the Sistema de Bibliotecas Públicas de Medellín and Brooklyn Public Library's "Books Unbanned" campaign.

IFLA President Session: Barbara Lison's President Session offered reflections on her tenure and the theme of building a sustainable future for libraries. The session delved into IFLA's strategic focus areas, including Strengthening the Global Voice of Libraries and Inspiring and Enhancing Professional Practice.

Climate Empowerment Discussion: The engaging session explored ways in which libraries can accelerate climate empowerment, featuring insights from speakers like Lenneke IJzendoorn and Erik Boekesteijn. Attendees actively participated, sharing ideas and examples of impactful initiatives.



IFLA School Library Manifesto: The session highlighted the importance of the IFLA School Library Manifesto in addressing education standards and reducing inequalities worldwide. Speakers from Nigeria, Turkey, and the United States shared experiences and strategies for leveraging the manifesto to enhance educational outcomes.

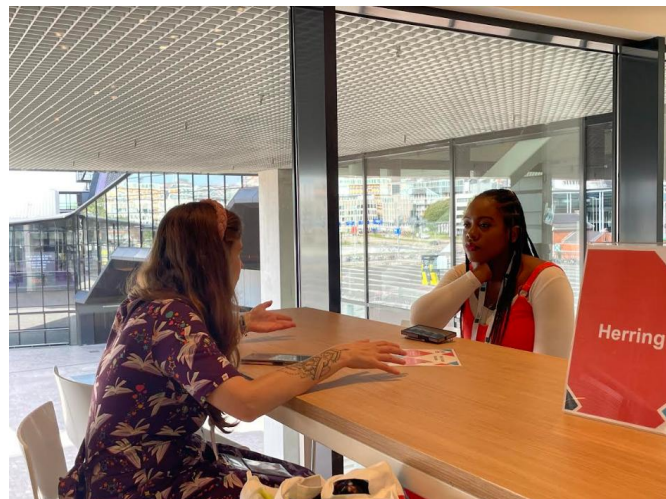


IFLA Green Library Award: Sponsored by IFLA's Environment, Sustainability & Libraries Section and De Gruyter Publishing, the IFLA Green Library Awards celebrated libraries promoting environmental and social sustainability. The winning projects, including the West Vancouver Memorial Library's Climate Writer in Residence program and Biblioteca EPM's educational efforts, exemplified innovative approaches to sustainability.

These sessions and discussions underscored the diverse and impactful initiatives driving positive change within the global library community, inspiring attendees to continue their efforts in advancing the field of librarianship.

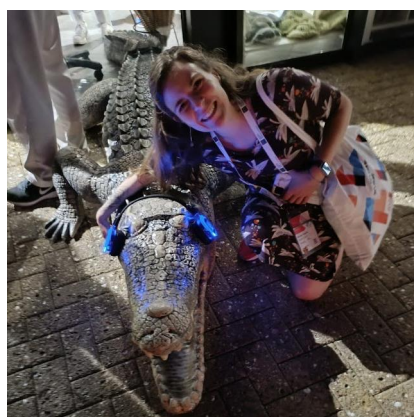
Braindate:

IFLA provided a designated area for attendees to connect with fascinating individuals and explore fresh ideas. The Braindate corner introduced a novel approach to networking, learning, and discussing topics of interest. I seized the opportunity to organize my own braindate, where I invited colleagues to engage in discussions about "RPG and board games in libraries". Together, we brainstormed ideas, exchanged best practices, and connected with like-minded individuals who shared our passions. It's an invaluable way to expand both your network and your knowledge with purpose and simplicity.



The cultural event:

Tuesday night's cultural event at Rotterdam Zoo Blijdorp was not only a delightful conclusion to the day's proceedings but also a heart-warming opportunity for all, including dedicated volunteers like myself, to come together and enjoy the festivities. The zoo, typically bustling with visitors, was opened exclusively for IFLA WLIC delegates. Buses transported us from the convention center to the zoo, where we enjoyed exploring the various exhibits, from the mesmerizing aquariums to the regal lions and giraffes. We were treated to snacks, drinks, and entertainment, including a Shanty choir and captivating animal acts. The highlight was a silent disco, where delegates danced the night away under the stars. It was a charming and memorable evening, fostering camaraderie and appreciation for the hard work of all involved, including us, the volunteers, who contributed to making the congress a success.



Day 3 highlights:

The second Emerging Leaders session on Wednesday was dedicated to outlining the steps necessary for IFLA to address key challenges and enhance its impact on the communities it serves. Participants, including Bryan Boy Cortez (Philippines), Mohd Ismail Abadin (Malaysia), Xiaofang Zhang (China), Zoe Dunlop (Germany), Evie Cordell (United States), Vivian Ampsonah (Ghana), Waleed Ahmed (Turkey), and Liudmilla Diadyk (Ukraine), contributed their insights, laying the groundwork for the Trend Report Update 2023. Discussions covered a range of topics, such as evolving perceptions of libraries, advocating for equality, leveraging digital technologies, improving legal frameworks, and reaffirming the significance of universal, community-centered services.

The session also delved into the implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on libraries, with a nuanced exploration of its potential threats and opportunities. IFLA President Barbara Lison emphasized the importance of inclusivity in AI deployment, asserting libraries' pivotal role in fostering trust and connection in this rapidly evolving landscape.



Exciting announcements were made regarding the establishment of IFLA Regional Offices for the period 2024-2026. These offices, located in Singapore, Argentina, Qatar, and South Africa, will serve as vital hubs for strengthening regional and national library networks, offering crucial support and information to members.

Furthermore, a dedicated session on eBooks provided a comprehensive overview of the current challenges and opportunities in digital lending. Speakers highlighted issues such as high eBook prices, disparities in access, and copyright regulations. Despite the challenges, there was a shared sense of optimism about collaborative efforts to drive positive change in eBook accessibility and affordability.

Additionally, the introduction of WLIC Hubs aimed to foster greater inclusivity and engagement among remote attendees, facilitating discussions on pertinent topics led by expert ambassadors from various regions.

The IFLA General Assembly, held in a hybrid format, provided a platform for members to make significant decisions about the federation's future direction, including the separation of the 2024 General Assembly from the World Library and Information Congress.

Lastly, a session focused on Caribbean and Latin American libraries showcased innovative initiatives aimed at advancing sustainable development goals (SDGs). From promoting information literacy to addressing societal inequalities, libraries in the region are actively contributing to building a sustainable future through diverse educational and community-focused projects.

Overall, these sessions underscored the dynamism and dedication within the global library community towards overcoming challenges and maximizing libraries' potential as agents of positive change in society.

Day 4 highlights: last day!

The World Library and Information Congress 2023 in Rotterdam concluded with warm and sunny weather, wrapping up a week filled with learning, reflection, discussion, and inspiration.

The President-elect session titled "Stronger Together" on the final day of the congress, led by Vicki McDonald, emphasized the power of collaboration within the library and information sector. Speakers highlighted the importance of building long-term relationships, involving communities in libraries, and collaborating with external partners to achieve common goals. The session underscored the significance of honest collaboration, learning from each other, and looking beyond individual communities to strengthen the collective impact of libraries worldwide.

The introduction of the IFLA Hubs program promoted increased inclusion and participation from remote delegates, fostering collaboration and exchange among participants from different regions.

The #WLICWOW 2023 initiative showcased inspiring moments shared by delegates on social media platforms, recognizing Madiareni Sulaiman as the winner, who received one full registration for the next IFLA WLIC.

During the Closing Session, outgoing President Barbara Lison made her final address, emphasizing the importance of transparency and collaboration to strengthen and unite the field of librarianship. Incoming President Vicki McDonald expressed her commitment to ensuring a strong, sustainable, and future-oriented IFLA, seeking collective advice, guidance, and support from the global library community. The ceremony also included the conferral of various awards and honors, highlighting the contributions and achievements of individuals and organizations in the library and information profession. Theo Kemperman, the Dutch National Committee Chair, emphasized the collective efforts of librarians worldwide, underscoring the essential role of libraries in meeting the needs of society.

Day 5: Tours!

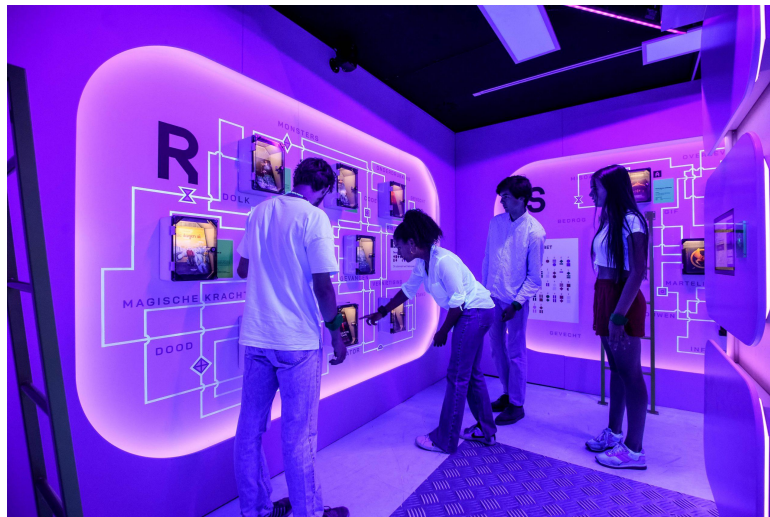
IFLA organized day tours of Dutch and Belgian libraries for delegates at an additional cost. One of the tours I registered for included visits to the Warehouse Rotterdam Public Library, a school library in Rotterdam, and the Literature Museum in The Hague.

The tour started at the Warehouse of the Rotterdam Public Library, housing 230,000 books and materials for school libraries in Rotterdam. The library serves 141 primary schools and 4 secondary schools, with a staff of 25 working in the education department. The tour then proceeded to Montessorischool Tuinstad, a primary school, and De Hef, a secondary school, both showcasing their school libraries.

Next, the tour headed to the Literature Museum in The Hague, located in the same building as the KB,



National Library, where IFLA's headquarters is situated. An exhibition titled "Back Street" focused on Young Adults was featured, offering a literary adventure where young people could discover, experience, and create stories. The exhibition provided various interactive experiences such as literary storytelling in a casino, meeting contemporary writers, language activities, and a tattoo shop game, aimed at engaging young adults aged 14 and above.



Conclusion:

The congress wasn't just an event; it was a deep dive into my professional world. It gave me a chance to reflect on my own practices, assess my progress, and set new goals for my career. Surrounded by the vibrant energy of the global library community, I felt inspired by the dedication and enthusiasm of professionals from around the world.

What made the experience truly rewarding was the connections I formed. These weren't just surface-level interactions; they were meaningful relationships forged through shared experiences, challenges, and passions. Whether through lively discussions, collaborative workshops, or informal networking, I found myself among kindred spirits who shared my love for libraries and information.

These connections went beyond mere professional ties; they evolved into lasting friendships. The sense of camaraderie and support that permeated the congress was truly remarkable. As I left the event, I felt not only professionally enriched but also deeply grateful for the bonds formed and the memories made.

