

Personal insights of the CILIPS Conference 2024: On Information for All, Censorship, and the role of Libraries

By E. Pastor Alventosa

My name is Emi and I have always been involved with libraries, during my school and university years as an avid reader and borrower of music and film material. After that, and almost unexpectedly, I started working in Public Libraries in the UK a few years ago in Croydon (Greater London).

That first experience developed and allowed me to aim for more, so four years ago, I relocated to Scotland, and I stepped into Academic Libraries. It has been since then that I have started to look seriously at Librarianship as a career, something that even if not directly related, I can see linked to my previous studies and passion in Journalism.

I heard about the bursary a few weeks ago, and I am very grateful to the CILIPS East Branch for offering me the opportunity to attend the first day. I definitely enjoyed the topics discussed, the vibrant atmosphere around me, and the interaction with colleagues and volunteers. All of this was really a plus for a programme that was very interesting from the very beginning - mainly because it highlighted the challenges and concerns that arise in the present and for the future.

The first day of the conference started with the initial intervention of James LaRue, public library director, former director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom and author of the book "On Censorship: A Public Librarian Examines Cancel Culture in the US. This keynote stayed with me as a highlight: The engaging conversation, the sense of humour, the cheerfulness of him vs the seriousness of the topic in a world, ours, in which "support for intellectual freedom is declining".

If James' opening conference speech hit home to me in so many ways because, when I look directly at my notebook, I can see words like "Resilience, Social Justice, Censorship, and Cancel Culture". His talk was centred in what has been happening over the past years on the other side of the Atlantic - where the political and social context has been heated for a good while - but the debate also seemed relevant in the UK, Europe or Worldwide.

When there are undeniable social changes, discussions like the increasing representation of the LGBTQ+ community, political polarization, and a viral soundboard in social media, how libraries and librarians see the effects?

If in the United States, "Libraries, Schools and Museums have been criminalized" via legislation to fit a specific political agenda. So, taking the insight of James' examples, how something like that would transform us as Library/Information professionals and, also, citizens?

Without doubt, attending the conference has been a great boost to my career and has opened my eyes towards new horizons in Librarianship. Even if I don't have a clear and straightforward path (do we ever have it?), it fascinates me to realize how much I don't know yet, and how many learning curves might be awaiting on the road.

My last paragraph is an invitation to anyone who hasn't attended the conference in the past, or to those ones who might need some extra financial support to go: if you are offered the opportunity to attend, take it. To me this was the second time that I participated, and I certainly enjoyed it much more than the first one, a couple of years ago. It might require you to step out of your comfort zone and wide-open ears to debates beyond your day-to-day role, but the benefit is out there for you, your institution, and the rest of the profession as well.