



Social Science Libraries: A Bridge to Knowledge for Sustainable Development

The Social Science Libraries Section (SSLS) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) sponsored a satellite conference, *Social Science Libraries: A Bridge to Knowledge for Sustainable Development*, in Havana, Cuba from August 8 through August 10, 2011. The conference was held at the Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba José Martí. Approximately 90 librarians and library workers were in attendance including 60 from Cuba, 20 from other countries, and 10 from the organizing committee. In addition to Cuba, individuals came from China, Greece, Mexico, Spain, Uruguay and the United States to present papers on topics that included digital libraries, open access to information, and related concepts. Individuals from Mexico and Switzerland also attended the conference. Webpages were provided in English and Spanish that included a call for papers, the eventual program, a link to the text of the papers and information on registration, travel and lodging. These pages can be found at <http://www.library.illinois.edu/cgs/IFLA/>.

In addition to welcome remarks from SSLS and ASCUBI (The Association of Cuban Libraries), remarks from the UNESCO Regional Office for Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Ministry for Informatics and Communication, and the National Library were provided. A total of thirteen papers, two workshops, and thirteen posters comprised the main body of the program. Papers are available through the IDEALS institutional repository at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at <http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/25649>. The committee is still seeking an appropriate repository for the posters and poster abstracts from the conference. This will most likely be linked off of the SSLS page within the IFLA website <http://www.ifla.org>. Within the first month since the conference was held, there had been over 280 downloads of the papers from the event.

As important as the new knowledge from these papers and posters is, it is also important to provide attendees both an introduction to the culture of the host country and to provide an opportunity for the individuals to get to know one another and discuss a variety of library-related issues. This was accomplished through several tours – the José Martí Memorial, the Municipal Library, the Museum of Literacy, and Old Havana – and social events. The social events were supported by the Ministry of Culture, Springer Science +Business Media, and the Cuban Office of UNESCO.

An evaluation form for the event was distributed both in paper and in print at the end of the conference. Fourteen evaluations were returned. Probably the most edifying result of the evaluation was, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being excellent, the average of all responses to this question was 1.15. The venue also received a near excellent ranking for comfort and convenience. The most popular presentations were *El panorama del acceso abierto en Cuba: Estrategias y modelo para su desarrollo* by Ricardo Casate, and *Problems to be Solved in Digitizing Old Chinese Sources*, the paper presented by Janxiong Ge. The two posters that were highly reviewed were Lic. Ascanio AlvarezAlvarez - El CIBE sus servicios y el Portal Interbancario and MsC. Nuria Esther Pérez Matos - Experiencias de una Ley de Bibliotecas en Cuba. Overall, the poster session received a rating of 1.67 on the scale, indicating a near excellent rating.

Comments received on the evaluation forms were very helpful. Respondents indicated a specific desire to see more programs and papers related to library participation in UNESCO's Memory of the World project, rare books and manuscripts, library cooperation and consortia, the legal aspects of preservation, assessment, collection policies, application of information literacy, the social impact of information institutions a function of development, trends in the development of copyright, and new trends in library education. One individual provided helpful feedback concerning presentations to multi-lingual audiences – "Perhaps guidelines could be provided to speakers for designing their PPT slides - e.g. reduce text to simplest bullet points, making font large and in bold, keeping the design simple. Also the use of PPT is very helpful to second language learners/listeners in particular. It helps emphasize the information the speaker is communicating by making it visible as well as audible." We should definitely keep this in mind for further conferences.

The tours were all very well received. A few of the statements were:

"Gustavo did an excellent job with the walking tour of Old Havana. I learned a great deal. I also liked seeing the Municipal Library in operation with users and hearing about their programs."

"All three visits were excellent and (I) learned a lot about Cuba and its excellent libraries, especially the innovative way the library is serving children."

"I found the visit to the Museo de la Alfabetización very interesting."

It was suggested that several other sites would have been desired including the National Archives and the University Library. One individual also suggested that it would have been nice to see more libraries during the hours of operation.

Finally, additional comments from the participants were highly congratulatory in all areas.

It is the opinion of the members of the IFLA SSLS Standing Committee that the conference met and exceeded objectives in the areas of the initial conference project objectives in relation to: attendance, general organization, and the quality of the papers presented. The addition of a poster session to the initial design of the meeting was also seen as highly beneficial, especially in allowing local librarians to

more closely participate in the conference. The committee would like to emphasize the incredible support for logistics, facilities, and translation provided by the host country.

As noted in the original proposal, the objectives of supporting the role of libraries in society, defending the principle of free information, promoting unrestricted access to information, the development of library professionals, and the promotion of standards, guidelines and best practices were key to the presentations during this program. The SSSL Standing Committee is of the opinion that these objectives were met in a variety of ways, and in a variety of formats during this conference. The only objective that remained unfulfilled was the distribution of two travel grants to assist Latin American librarians to attend the conference. Whether it was the difficulty of traveling to the U.S. or the general economic conditions of the day, there were no individuals who fully qualified to receive these grants due to the requirement that they would have to travel on to the main IFLA conference. Of the six applicants received, none were able to show proof of registration for the IFLA/WLIC in San Juan, Puerto Rico following the satellite conference. This is perhaps an issue that might be discussed by the higher administration in IFLA or might become part of the history of the section with the suggestion that other travel grants also be offered to individuals who would like to travel to both a satellite conference and the general conference in the future.

Members of the Cuban Organizing Committee:

President: Dr. Eduardo Torres Cuevas

Vice-president: MSc. Nancy Machado Lorenzo

Secretary: Ms. Yolanda Núñez González

Coordinators: MSc. Martha Terry González
Sr. Robert Valdez Muñoz

Scientist Committee: Dr. Maria Elena Dorta Duque
MSc. Vilma Ponce Suárez
MSc. Margarita Bellas

Finance Committee: Ms. Joanny Sanchez Véliz

Public Relations Committee: Ms. Cristina Rodriguez

Members of the IFLA SSSL Organizing Committee:

Conference Chair:

Lynne M. Rudasill (Chair)

Global Studies Librarian

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Chief Conference Organizer:

Maria Elena Dorta-Duque

Directora de Información Científica Biblioteca

Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales

Participating Members of the IFLA Social Science Libraries Section:

Elizabeth Cooper (Secretary/Treasurer)
Anthropology & Journalism Librarian and
Reference Services Team Leader
Emory University

Wilda B. Newman (Information Coordinator/Editor of Newsletter)
Knowledge Resources Associates, LLC

Britta Biedermann
Institute of Sociology
University of Zürich

Deborah Cheney
Larry and Ellen Foster Communications Librarian and
Head, The News and Microforms Library
The University Libraries
The Pennsylvania State University

Kayo Denda
Head, Margery Somers Foster Center/Women's Studies Librarian
Mabel Smith Douglass Library
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Fred J. Hay
Professor/Librarian
Appalachian State University
Belk Library and Information Commons

Patricia A. Wand
Information Consultant



Submitted by Lynne Rudasill,
Professional Committee, Div. I
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Center for Global Studies
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