

## IFLA World Library and Information Congress.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

24 – 30 August, 2018

Kay Poustie Scholarship Report



### Acknowledgements



Petronis Twin Towers

In August 2018, I attended the 2018 World Library and Information Congress, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

I am extremely grateful to the State Library Western Australia, and Public Libraries Western Australia for the support they gave me through the award of a Kay Poustie bursary to attend the event.

I am also grateful to the City of Swan, who also supported me to attend this conference, through time off, and some contribution towards expenses.

Also to PLWA, ALIA West, and Fremantle Public Library for the opportunity to report back to colleagues on our experiences.

Attending IFLA WLIC 2018 has been an extremely rewarding experience for me in many ways, I am hopeful that the following report will express the value of this experience not only for myself, but for the broader library profession.

### My first IFLA

It was with a great deal of excitement that I boarded the plane for my first trip to an IFLA conference, my first trip to Malaysia, and for that matter, my first trip overseas since late last century. So I may have looked a bit of a wide eyed tourist when I arrived in Kuala Lumpur airport. I was certainly a target for “Touters” as I emerged, somewhat bewildered, and chose a taxi that looked relatively safe, until I got inside and

realised that this was completely unlike the interior of any Taxi I had ever seen. Oh

dear, it was too late to get out now. An hour later I arrived in KL City Centre, possibly somewhat overcharged, but safe.

I had arrived a couple of days before the conference began, and I spent those two days gloriously lost. I found the Petronas Twin Towers (it wasn't hard :) and they became a



Selfie at Symphony Lake KLCC

regular feature on the skyline. I discovered pretty quickly that as long as I could see them, then I knew how to get back to the hotel.

I explored the the extensive train network, various markets and experienced the Kuala Lumpur City Centre in its splendour. Including the beautiful KLCC Park and especially Symphony Lake with its spectacular coloured and choreographed water fountains.

I even managed to find the convention centre in the midst of the KLCC, and I checked in nice and early to get the first pick of the hand woven Malaysian bags which all delegates received.

I was also extremely grateful to receive an invitation to the first timer's session on the day one. This session itself was extremely valuable, I'm not sure how well I would have navigated the conference without it. It was also encouraging to find so many welcoming people from all over the world. All ready to introduce themselves and meet new people too.

### Opening Ceremony

There is a danger that this report could become a gushing tribute to the many wonderful things I saw at IFLA. I will be mindful of that. But one thing I should probably gush about is the Opening Session. For a first timer to IFLA, to enter an auditorium filled with over three and a half thousand people from all over the world, was impressive. The Opening Session was a cultural experience. Taking us on a journey through the many aspects of Malaysian culture, from the past and travelling through to the future.



WLIC 2018 Opening Ceremony

It was inspirational to be in a room with so many other like-minded people from around the world, and over the coming week I came to realise just how much we did have in common, as evidenced by the IFLA Global vision, which I believe is a major achievement on a worldwide scale.

### Conference Programme

One of the great features of the IFLA conference was the WLIC 2018 app, which I was able to download from the App store, to both my iPad and my phone. This app enabled me to keep track of everything that was going on, to highlight the sessions that I wanted to attend, and to plan my days accordingly.

An overview of the sessions that I attended each days is below:

<b>Thursday 23 August</b>	Found the convention centre and checked in
<b>Friday 24</b>	6:00 Dinner at the Australian High Commission with other

<b>August</b>	pm	Australian and New Zealand delegates
<b>Saturday 25 August</b>	8:30 am	Newcomers Session
	10.30 am	Opening Session
	1:45 pm	Winning Strategies for collecting, cataloguing, providing, playing and preserving video games in libraries
	4:00 pm	Exhibition Opening Party
<b>Sunday 26 August</b>	9:30 am	Motors of Change: Changing ourselves to Change our World
	1:45 pm	Sanctuaries in the city: the public library as a safe place
	4:00 pm	Designing inclusive libraries
<b>Monday 27 August</b>	8:30 am	Libraries for Children – presentation of the new IFLA Guildelines at TTDI Public Library
	1:30 pm	Library Services to People with Special Needs
	7:00 pm	Cultural Evening
<b>Tuesday 28 August</b>		
	1:45 pm	Libraries Transformed to transform their communities (Society) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full STEAM ahead: Empowering and catalysing creative thinking and social entrepreneurial skills</li> </ul>
	1:45 pm	Literacy in the Workplace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology Tea for Staff – Atlanta Meyer</li> </ul>
	4:00 pm	General Assembly
<b>Wednesday 29 August</b>	8:30 am	Let's work together: collaborating and partnering to achieve IFLA's vision – President Elect's session – Christine Mackenzie
	10:45 am	Advocacy 101: Every Librarian an advocate!
	10:45 am	Lightning talks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Atlanta Meyer – My INELI Toolkit</li> </ul>
	4:15 pm	Closing Session
<b>Thursday 30 August</b>	8:00 am	Local Library Visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selangor Public Library</li> <li>• SRI KDU schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sri KDU Primary</li> <li>○ Sri KDU Secondary</li> <li>○ SRI KDU International School</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The conference programme was jam packed with sessions, some of which overlap, and delegates are left to decide for themselves when to take breaks. This took a bit of getting used to. But I felt that I settled into a pretty good pattern.

One of the early highlights of the program for me was a session on Saturday “Winning Strategies for collecting, cataloguing, providing, playing and preserving video games in libraries, and in particular a session titled “Blurred Lines – between virtual reality games, research and education” This tied in with a lot of what we are trying to do in technology Programs at the City of Swan. Much of what we are trying to do is to use technology to engage with our communities in ways that inspire them. It was interesting to see that for a University Library (in this case McGill University, Canada) this was actually a primary focus for them too. We want to be able to give our members some structure around the innovative programs and services that we are offering, but we also want them to be able to develop their own understanding of the technologies, and to develop for themselves how they want to be using it. This seemed to be similar to the experience at McGill University too.

Another session which I found particularly valuable was the Advocacy 101 session, which I discuss in more detail later in this report.

Even outside the regular programme there is always plenty to do. The exhibition hall was open for most of the conference. Honestly, being a programs librarian, I probably would have liked to see some more cool technology in there. But it was always good to go in for a low pressure stroll to see what interesting things were on offer.

The posters too, I was able to check out along the “Library Boulevard” in the Convention Centre. It was impressive to see the great things that people were up to.

## Public Library Visits



Pustaka KL @ TTDI  
(for the launch of the IFLA Guidelines for Children)

Some of the highlights of the IFLA programme for me were getting out to see other libraries.

I was able to do this on Monday, for the launch of the IFLA Guidelines for Children. I caught a “Grab” (Malaysian equivalent to an Uber) on the advice of the concierge of my hotel, and was a little disappointed to hear on arrival that the bus carrying other delegates travelled there under police escort.

The library was brand new and pristine with an impressive collection of technology, including table top touch screens, and projected interactive images on the floor of the children’s section, as well as dedicated audio visual listening rooms and computing spaces.

Luckily they found room for me on the bus for the trip home. That police escort really helped cut through the heavy traffic.

Then on Thursday, after the conference had officially closed, I had enrolled in the Library Visits programme, and was able to catch another police escorted bus out to Selangor Public Library.



*Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah Al-Haj Ibn Almarhum Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Al-Haj  
(Sultan of Selangor, and Patron of Selangor Public Library)*

Selangor Public Library was especially impressive. A six storey high building funded by the local Sultan. This library incorporated a 3D movie lounge, and a 6D cinema experience, even the chairs vibrated and gyrated as we were plummeted through a Star Wars style Pod Race.

Another important feature of this amazing library were the dedicated room for sight impaired patrons, including braille computers and typewriters, and even a braille enhanced chess set.

And then there was the Sultan's collection, an entire wing with everything decked out in bright yellow. Some of the items were showcased in elaborate glass cases including handwritten, and beautifully manuscripts of the Quran. It was very interesting to see this different funding model for libraries. I have to admit, it would be pretty great to have a local Sultan.

## **Advocacy**

Another really important aspect of the IFLA conference for me came out of a session titled Advocacy 101. Where I learned that Advocacy does not have to be rocket science, it is just about working wherever we are in our own sphere of influence, to raise the profile of the important work that we do.

"I am a passionate Public Librarian". Was a quote from the current IFLA president Gloria Perez-Salmeron. And it goes for me too.

And I see public libraries as being so important to the future of libraries, especially in regards to the IFLA Global vision for libraries, and the Sustainable Development Goals. But also because we know that libraries are not just about collections, and information service provision. We're about connecting people. And that is such an important thing in a fast paced changing world.

And I think it's really important for us as Public Librarians to step up and make our voices heard. It's not always easy for us. But it is important that we do it.

We all know our value, so it's important that we take those opportunities when they arise, in the elevator, at the coffee machine, in those awkward moments with the Mayor, waiting for an event to start. Or even just talking with our friends on a Friday night.

## **The Futures Lab Abroad**

In my application for the Kay Poustie scholarship, I discussed our own innovative project, The Futures Lab, here at City of Swan Libraries, and the journey that this project has taken us on.

Not only have we been able to explore new technologies, and provide new and innovative services to our customers. We have also learned so much about what libraries mean to our local communities.

We are about so much more than just books. We are hubs where people can connect.

In an age where technology promises to connect us all, social isolation seems to be increasing. And by challenging those basic assumptions of a library we can then get better at articulating our true value, especially to those people who are making decisions about our funding (oh! For a local Sultan).

And in that original application, I stated that I would answer the questions of:

**What business are public libraries really in? What will be the public library service offering in 2021?**

Of course I went to IFLA with a strong understanding that Libraries are about so much more than just books. It sounds almost clichéd to say it now. We all know it.

I was inspired by how united in our vision our profession could be. And this is highlighted by the IFLA Global Vision which I have included below.

*The Global Vision discussion highlights show libraries are:*

- *Dedicated to providing equal and free access to information and knowledge*
- *Deeply committed to core roles in supporting literacy, learning and reading*
- *Focused on our communities*
- *Embracing digital innovation*
- *Strong advocates for libraries at national and regional leader level*
- *Aware that funding is our biggest challenge*
- *Eager to work more collaboratively and develop strong partnerships*
- *Desiring to be less bureaucratic and resistant to change*
- *Proud to be guardians of the memory of the world*
- *Attracting young professionals deeply committed and eager to lead*

And the Global Vision clearly demonstrates the business that we are in. With the ten above highlights also come the ten opportunities for Action. So it is so much more than just an abstract vision. It is an action plan. That demonstrates that libraries have such an important part in our societies, and we are here to stay.

My attendance at IFLA has confirmed in so many wonderful ways, my belief that the business that Libraries in is connecting people. And even in itself, IFLA is a way for us as Librarians to connect, and find common ground in this way.

**The role of public libraries in the community development space**

In the Advocacy session, which I have already mentioned as a highlight, we heard a lot about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs provide a comprehensive list of issues that politicians care about and demonstrate the IFLA approach to these is to demonstrate the many ways that Libraries contribute to these.

A document that really appealed to me was the “Libraries and the Sustainable Development Goals: a storytelling manual”. This booklet (available from [www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/libraries-development/documents/sdg-storytelling-manual.pdf](http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/libraries-development/documents/sdg-storytelling-manual.pdf)).

I felt that this was a particularly useful resource and especially liked the quote, that “Stories affirm who we are and allow us to experience the similarities between ourselves and others, real or imagined. Stories help us find meaning in our lives.”

And I heard many great stories about amazing libraries doing amazing things, one in particular about a library in Africa that was built on land donated by a local villager, and filled entirely with items donated by members of the community. And I’m so sorry that I don’t know exactly where that library was, as I heard about it from a casual encounter. But even though it was a casual encounter, it was a story that has stuck with me because stories have power. And we can use them to build communities.

This is so encouraging, because although we, as librarians, can be pretty good at providing statistics to demonstrate the value of our services. I believe we need to also learn to make those statistics come alive through stories.

### **Public libraries and their contribution to the STEAM agenda**

I did attend quite a few sessions on libraries who were doing innovative things with technology. One of my favourites was the ‘Audio Visual and Multimedia Section, where I heard about libraries working with virtual reality, as well as others gamifying learning experiences. And I think we will always have a role, as we always have done, in assisting people to adapt to new and innovative technologies.

I was honestly a little disappointed with the lack of technology display in the exhibition hall. But perhaps that’s just because I’m a tech geek, and I may have been thinking of the wrong conference (the Edutech conference in Brisbane, 2016 was amazing for this).

The technology that I saw available in Public Libraries was very impressive. I saw that Malaysian Libraries value new and emerging technologies too. And were providing opportunities for their customers to explore and adapt to new technologies.

A couple of times I heard comments in speeches by Malaysian Officials, stating the Malaysian goal to become a “Developed” nation by 2020. They call this Vision 2020 and it was unveiled by the former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohammad. It struck that the “STEAM” agenda is particularly important for developing countries, and by prioritising this, Malaysia has certainly facilitated their own development, whether they actually reach the 2020 Vision or not.



Enjoying the 6D Cinema at Selangor Public Library

## Conclusion

I gained so much from my IFLA experience. And it was so much more than just the excitement of international travel, and experiencing a different culture.

I met people from around the world with a shared vision to me. Even now, almost three months later, I still feel inspired by that. Not everyone gets to work in such an environment as a library where we are able to make such a big impact in people's lives. I feel so privileged to be able to do that.

I was able to see other public libraries, and realised that we have so much more in common than we do that is different.

I gained some tools and insight into improved ways to Advocate for Libraries in my own sphere of influence. It's not necessarily rocket science. We all know that the value is there. It's just a matter of articulating that in a way that our stakeholders can also value.

I have also gained some excellent opportunities to share my experiences of IFLA through being part of the Kay Poustie scholarship. I have presented my experiences with staff here at the City of Swan Library service, and I also had the opportunity to share these at the PLWA report back session at Fremantle Library in October.

And this report is another way that I can share my experience, of a trip that not only renewed my energy for our important profession, while at the same time inspiring me to renew my commitment to working with our communities to design services that are driven by their needs.

My trip to IFLA has also inspired me to broaden my horizons, and realise that we are part of a global community.

That is immensely energising and for that I am extremely grateful.

Thank you.

**Shane Dowling** 

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Sharing the IFLA Vision (and continuing the selfie tradition)