

# 11.1

**International Federation of Library Associations  
18<sup>th</sup> Annual World Library and Information Congress  
August 19-25, 2023, Rotterdam, The Netherlands  
Chair Matthew Luloff**

The 2023 International Federation of Library Associations World Library and Information Congress was an insightful and valuable experience for me.

The wide variety in programming seemed to have been underpinned by a larger discussion on the implications of artificial intelligence. While there were several sessions specific to the discussion of generative artificial intelligence, and the implications of the use of artificial intelligence in cataloging and other areas of importance to the library, there were very few sessions that I attended where artificial intelligence did not either come up in discussion, or as part of the presentation in some manner.

In one session dedicated to a discussion on generative artificial intelligence, one presenter argued that artificial intelligence will be destructive to librarianship, will make it difficult for intellectual capacity building, and will end up producing convincing misinformation. While some of these arguments were compelling, I personally believe that these challenges can be overcome by librarians. Our library and many libraries across the country have been running programs and services dedicated to recognizing misinformation. The point of misinformation is to be convincing, and it is our responsibility as an organization to ensure that we are responding to this kind of misinformation by building capacity to enhance critical thinking by providing a sound resource for research and help with discerning different types of misinformation.

Proponents of the use of generative artificial intelligence argued that librarians can play a key role in acquiring tools and skills to manage data and to make data more transparent, that organizations such as ours must re-examine fair use, that libraries can support data literacy, and that the best author is a human using artificial intelligence with full skill and insight. Another speaker touted artificial intelligence in education but identified a risk of bias depending on what prompt is used. This speaker also argued that we must look beyond the prompt and that librarians can be a wonderful resource in making suggestions for prompts to an artificial intelligence engine. It was also identified that artificial intelligence can be used to provide more voice services, kind of like the Alexa or Siri of the library. I found this point particularly interesting as it pertains to making library services more accessible to those in need of accommodation. It was

pointed out that 20% of Google searches are done by voice and that increasing accessibility at libraries through the use of artificial intelligence and voice recognition will increase our relevance into the future. The same speaker argued that librarians must assume a crucial role in a data society or risk marginalization.

Some things for our senior leadership team to consider when deciding to embrace or restrict the use of artificial intelligence in our system:

- 1- Stay informed
- 2- Identify use cases
- 3- Evaluate AI generated solutions
- 4- Conduct user education
- 5- Collaborate with experts
- 6- Monitor and evaluate quality
- 7- Address ethical considerations transparently

In the conversation, it was reiterated that artificial intelligence can be good for accessibility and good for translation services. I participated in the discussion by posing a question to the panel regarding the use of artificial intelligence and explicit bias in prompts and programmed responses and how this may play a role in stifling intellectual freedom. I pointed out that artificial intelligence may pick up on cues in the language of prompts and that responses may be riddled with confirmation bias, and stated that while I believe artificial intelligence will become our friend, librarians can play a critical role where artificial intelligence and intellectual freedom collide.

I attended several sessions on librarians' and libraries' roles in crises. Librarians can play a critical role during crises by info gathering and distribution, by providing access to technology, by decoding health risk communication, by capacity building, by providing computer and functional information literacy, by providing access to information, by providing language access, by being mobile and bringing services to the community both within the crisis and outside of it, and by building partnerships in advance of a crisis to respond better. In preparation for an emergency, it is crucial that the library has a plan for as many kinds of crises as we may encounter. It is also important to archive material so that it may be used again should a similar crisis evolve in the future.

I am pleased to report that our partner on the new Central Library, Leslie Weir, was elected president of the IFLA. Following a period where she will be known as the president-elect, she will take the leadership of this organization at a crucial time for us, the opening of Adisōke. The timing could not be better, and we are so proud as Canadians to have one of our own in such a prominent position internationally.

I took the time in between sessions to visit the new Rotterdam Central Library. I was particularly impressed with the public space and the use of this public space. While I have seen attempts to make giant chess a thing in our city, I was surprised to see a massive cohort of individuals lined up and intensely watching a game in the lobby. It

was clear that this is truly a public space. Periodicals and new reads were immediately accessible upon walking into the building. There were local newspapers and magazines that were available to take for free. There were several publications dedicated to local arts and culture, music, and editorials. I was a bit surprised to find that there was a charge to use the washroom! Putting that aside, it was obvious that great pains were taken to make this building a truly public space, inside and out. The restaurant was well attended, there was a coffee shop on the main floor, and the way the front entrance of the building was laid out, created a very welcoming and open space. The architecture was incredible. The sustainability aspects of the building were also very visible, and in my reading, I discovered they are incredibly effective. I found it inspiring to visit a new central branch and to find the public realm elements so well used.

In between sessions I was able to reconnect with some of our international cohorts, and to share ideas on intellectual freedom, removing barriers to access library services, and many of the other policies that our board has pursued and achieved over the course of the last few years.

Overall, this was a wonderful and valuable experience for me as I was able to learn about the challenges that the library community is anticipating into the future and to contemplate what policy, if any, will be required to address these challenges. I would like to thank the board, staff, and our Chief Librarian for the support they provided in allowing me to attend this conference!