

**2022 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)
World Library and information Congress (WLIC)**

July 24-29, 2022, Dublin, Ireland

From Chair Matthew Luloff

The IFLA/ILC Conference in Dublin was an interesting opportunity for networking and professional development. It was wonderful to strengthen our relationship with key partners including LAC team and Indigenous partners. We were able to share best practices and see where we are leading and where we need to go as an organization. The sessions were mostly thoughtful and informative, however there were two, in particular, that I found very interesting.

It was incredibly interesting to hear what other libraries are doing to bolster democratic participation. Both sessions touch on this. Perhaps it is because I am naturally interested in democracy, or perhaps libraries are often described as the last bastion of true democracy, but it was the sessions on democratic engagement and combatting misinformation that I found most enlightening. We live in particularly polarised times, and we have a real opportunity to play an important role in informing and fostering understanding among disparate groups. Finally, the session on building new spaces in older buildings, I felt was very relevant given the renovations many branches are undergoing.

Some of the specific programming ideas I found or thought of while engaged in presentations that would be relevant to the OPL were as follows:

- Mock polling stations to demystify the process for young voters and newcomers
- Hosting debates between public intellectuals and advocates
 - o This demonstrates the ability to disagree in a productive and respectful manner
 - o A series like this would build a proprietary digital content library
 - Videos
 - Podcasts
 - o It animates the space after hours and brings new people to the library

- It becomes a new digital touchpoint should the OPL use services like Spotify and Apple Music to distribute this free content.
- Similar to debates, hosting lectures on thought-provoking topics might be another interesting way to achieve the same goals listed above.
- Fact-Checking Services and pages with fulsome and contextual information regarding statements made by public figures.
- A toolkit for thinking critically about public statements regarding hot topics, coupled with a public information campaign.

Finally, developing a cursory understanding of the challenges engineers face in retrofitting space that was not originally purpose-built for collections and library services was quite valuable. Load-bearing frames, shelving, public space and access, and other architectural challenges were discussed. It is not as easy as we may think, and it certainly is not always financially responsible. Sometimes a retrofit ends up costing more than a new build, and I found this presentation particularly enlightening.

Overall, the IFLA/ILC Conference was a valuable experience. Some of the programming was overtly political, which I was not expecting, nor do I support. I question the relevance of this within the conference setting. The concept of librarians of activists must be considered in light of their role as public servants. While operating in an official capacity, librarians are the guardians and purveyors of fact and knowledge. I see their role in helping people to understand and be engaged in democracy.

All of this being said, I left the conference excited for what the future holds for public libraries, and the OPL in particular. I would not hesitate to recommend this conference to any future interested participants. I found it very valuable for both the ideas discussed, and the connections our delegation made with members of the international community. It helped me to understand where we are ahead of the curve and where we need to strengthen our offerings.