

Sofia, Bulgaria 2008: an Experience

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SOFIA, BULGARIA 2008:

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My Sofia, Bulgaria 2008 Conference experience began in Milwaukie, Oregon with the development of my poster, printing then finally leaving for Sofia via Istanbul, Turkey. I left for my travels on the 4th of November 2008. After five days in Istanbul I traveled with a few other members of the Emporia State University Oregon eight cohort by bus to Sofia. Our bus ride meandered through the countryside of Bulgaria until we arrived in Sofia on the 9th of November. Arriving that night was the beginning of my journey as a student, professional and traveler into the world of globalized information science.

The first area of study for the conference involved exploring the city of Sofia. To get acquainted with Bulgarian culture I toured the city on foot. To view the important government and historical sites I simply followed the yellow brick road to cultural sites such as the Aleksandur Nevski Memorial Church, Russian Church and Monument to Sveta Sofia. One of the most interesting stops was at the street market in front of the Aleksandur Nevski Memorial Church. At this market local people were selling their handmade goods and collections. The collections chronicled the changes of powers in Bulgaria, pop culture and tradition.

The conference opening session was quite remarkable. As I waited for the speakers to begin I noticed men around the room similar the Secret Service. The opening began with Mr. Alexander Dimchev introducing the Chairman of the National Assembly of Bulgaria Mr. Georgi Pirinski the man of the hour, who required the secret service. What an honor it was to see him so close and listen to his speech. He spoke smoothly with emotion and without notes. He gave an overview of the value of the conference and thanked the organizers and participants. Then before you know it he was gone with his guards, leaving behind a crowd

of conference participants the quietly spoke of his speaking ability and the honor of having such an important Bulgarian figure supporting the profession and the conference.

The first session I attended in the main hall was about the Information Literacy. The hall was about half full of attendees listening to the presenters from Bulgaria, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The first presenter as I heard it from another conference attendee is well known for her professional work in the subject of literacy. The presenter Carla Basili outlined the evolution of literacy in definition and theory. Her presentation generally described how a wide range of factors, characterized by the three perspectives (academic discipline, socio-political and cognitive) impact literacy. She ended by stating that literacy needs to be defined and valued if the issues and circumstances around literacy are to improve and be addressed.

To add to her presentation the second presenters Armando Malheiro da Silva and Viviana Fernandez Marcial described their study conducted in Portugal. Their study confirmed the information presented by Ms. Basili's and added specific details about the impacts that impede literacy. They cited perception issues, emotions, facility backing, economics and location as factors that impact and impede literacy.

Following the first session all the students headed out the National Library to make our poster session presentations. The presentations took place in the second level of the library in the hallway, utilizing the acoustics of the building so that we would not need a microphone and speakers. There were a total of 22 posters; with so many posters we were limited to 5 minutes a piece for each speech. Completing the presentation of our posters in this short period of a time challenged each of us to be concise and clear in describing our posters. There were two posters that I remember the most. One that was about the globalization of Sesame Street detailing how the show is not only translated, but also

repackaged for specific audiences all over the world. The other was about the history of libraries in Bulgaria and Romania. The poster was a timeline that showed the evolution of Bulgarian community center style libraries to public institutions and Romanian public libraries transition from public to community center style library institution. Her presented thesis was that Bulgarian libraries are stronger than Romanian because they began with the community.

The evening ended with a short tour of the National Library, keynote speaker Monsignor Chesare Pasini, Prefect of the Vatican Archive and Library and a banquet. The tour of the library was interesting, because the library uses both an electronic and physical card catalog of new materials entering the collection and the older items in the collection. The very old items are only found in the physical card catalog.

The Keynote speech was interesting although it was very hard to hear. The speaker was hard to hear, because acoustics in the Sofia University lecture hall created an echo and interfered with the output from the speakers. What I was able to hear was a detailed description of the history of the Vatican library including a view of the library in the future continuing the vision of Nicholas V. His vision was of an open library and archive for scholars and researchers from all over world to use freely.

After the speech everyone headed to the basement of the University. As the group arrived downstairs the crowd swarmed the food table, they were pushing and pulling to get to the food. After about 15 minutes of crazy food grabbing, it was announced that there was an additional table of food in another room, as about half of the group moved on to the next room the food table cleared and the stress level of the group eased. I noticed something somewhat odd while trying to get some food. The people from the United States (mostly

students) formed a line to get food, yet most of the other people seemed to not observe the line they just pushed in front of the orderly line and grabbed food as quickly they could.

The next morning I began session four listening to presentations about digital and virtual libraries, the presentations outlined the benefits and hurdles they experienced in creating their institutions digital and virtual libraries. They detailed the physical process of taking hard copy materials and turning them into digital documents, as well as the importance of creating high-resolution documents in the beginning to ensure a future for digitized documents. The specific hurdles identified were the need for clear policies for lending and access to avoid duplication within consortia. They closed with the question, how eternal are digital documents? The presenters felt that the future could lie in technologies such as automation similar to the Seattle Public Library in Washington State. As well as furthering decentralized library systems. Decentralized libraries I believe show promises based on current examples in the United States such as Multnomah County, Oregon library system. The network style library system has shown that dollars can be stretched further and larger numbers of patrons can be reached through their implementation.

The following session I found the presentation on evidence-based management particularly interesting, because one of the students presented a poster on the topic the day before. This coincidence proved the relevance of her topic choice to the professional community. The topic presenter Gary M. Pitkin spoke about the need for libraries to prove their worth to the community that they serve. He said that libraries must develop hard data for marketing to continue and increase library services and funding. He further outlined a process of assessment, planning, budgeting and action. The process moves in a never-ending cycle to achieve evidence-based library management. He closed by inviting Emporia

State University students to apply for a new position opening at his institution, the University of Northern Colorado Libraries, based on our participation in the conference and interest/value of evidence-based management. I think it was at this point that I realized how beneficial conferences could be for institutions and professionals to find one another.

The next session I attended I arrived to late to my regret, because Cecelia Lee from U21 Global, Singapore seemed to have the attendees on the edge of their seats with her presentation. She spoke about her work in the virtual library and the use of Web 2.0 to deliver excellent library services. The portion of her presentation that I was able to listen to was about using widgets and Google analytics for increasing use of the virtual library.

Within the same session I found Bradley L. Schaffner the Harvard Librarian's presentation about "Enhancing Library Resources Through Electronic Resources," moving. The subject area of Harvard's electronic resources project, the Soviet Social System, is fascinating especially with the setting of the conference being a post Communist country. The preservation of first hand accounts of history create great research tools, in addition to carrying possible social affects of change and understanding through their remembrance and use. I imagine the project to be gratifying, it also shows the power of the library and its' staff to do "good" and be a force in the global understanding.

My final comments about this session are about the unprofessional and professional character of the speakers. During the question and answer period one of the panel speakers questioned the word choice of Mr. Schaffner to a degree that it was uncomfortable for the audience. Viewing the display showed that being a professional sometimes means taking the higher road when a fellow colleague is behaving badly. Mr. Schaffner apologized and asked for an alternate word repeatedly before the other speaker backed down. The other

panel speaker never gave him an alternative word choice for his future description of the topic.

The next two sessions I attended were my favorite, they were on the topic of education. The presenters for this topic explored the education of patrons, the library's role in the education system and the education of librarians. Of these, two presentations stood out the most, one by a woman from Germany titled "Teaching Information Management: More Than technical Knowledge" and the other by a man from Murray State University titled "Well Hello Blogger! Library Education 2.0: Bye, Bye, Blackboard?"

Kira Klenk from Germany spoke about the need for structure for lesson learning in teaching information management. Her presentation bridged the worlds of parenting, life skills and library/information studies. She stated that, "students want rules, rules show that professors care" this philosophy is similar to what parents do. Parents say to their children that they make rules, because they "love" their children, so the professor should have rules because "they care."

The "Hello Blogger" presentation was creative in title, delivery and content. The Power point utilized many Web 2.0 tools and graphics. Mr. Koren described how education needs a "we" feeling to be the most effective. He encouraged the use of new web tools to create the "we" feeling. He said students understand if tools do not work out and often will not realize when a new tool is not part of the trusted curriculum tools. His suggestions for starting to use Web 2.0 tools were to teach library education by moving away from blackboard to blogging, slide share and wikis. He made the following statement that resonated with me; "librarian's are facilitators of conversations we should practice participatory librarianship. " This statement stayed with me, because I believe in

information as a process, such that librarians act as a guide to and through information, rather than acting as a human catalog.

The final presentation that I enjoyed was presented about Ethics. Teresa Swieckowska of Poland described how political structures both promote and impede the access of individuals to information. She spoke specifically about the democratic political structure that empowers many in theory, but delivers to a select few that gain the right to education, economics, and social status. Within the system mostly the poor, minorities and woman are left behind, disenfranchised in their pursuit of information. Her interpretation of this political structure was the first that I have heard of, it speaks to the struggles of the education systems and illiteracy throughout some of the most developed nations of the world. The presentation content was heavy and critical, yet gave meaning to the statement that “knowledge is power.” More than anything I liked this speaker and topic because it got me thinking about the how information is controlled and the systems that control it.

This conference was my first information professional conference. Getting to know new people, network, and explore topics of interest in the professional community, boldly demonstrated the value of professional development through conferences. Conferences can and will act as continuing education for my professional career. There is hope for future libraries, because “we” are thinking critically, sharing and developing innovative ideas at these conferences. I am excited to attend and hopefully present at conferences in the future.