

1. Information on the event

I received funding from the German government to attend the international iConference in Berlin in March 2014. The iConference is an international event bringing together participants from schools from around the globe. The 2014 conference was the first year the event was held in Europe, with Germany's [Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin](#), chosen to host the event, along with program administration by Denmark's [Royal School of Library and Information Science](#).

This was my first international Conference.

Some basic information on the event is as follows:

Total participants: 450

Countries represented: 30 countries total, the top ten follow: United States (242 participants); United Kingdom (26); Denmark (26); Canada (22); Germany (22); Japan (12); China (10); Sweden (8)

Papers presented: 39

Notes presented: 36

Posters presented: 66

Workshops presented: 11

Sessions for Interaction and Engagement presented: 17

Social Media Expo presentations: 6

Doctoral Colloquium Participants: 24

The theme of the event was *"Breaking Down Walls – Culture • Context • Computing"*.

The target audience was anyone working in the field of information. It was mostly made up of international academics, college professors, PHD students. It also included some of my old lecturers from University College Dublin, so it was nice to see a familiar faces.

There were 2 key note speakers. Firstly there was Tony Hey, Vice-President of Microsoft research connection. I felt this was an odd choice to have as one of the main keynote speakers. In an age when online privacy has all but been eroded, and there was talks during the conference on online privacy and how corporations are storing our personal, online data, to get one of the keynote speaker to be from a company who is responsible for doing this was to me, a very strange choice.

The second keynote was given by Melissa Terras, Director at the UCL Centre for Digital Humanities, whose talk was entitled *"Cultural computing clash: building successful digital projects in humanities"*

and heritage". This was a really excellent talk. Dr. Terras and her team are doing some incredible work; how computers and lasers are being used to help preserve and restore old documents.

The format of the conference was fairly generic. There was a session of talks you could go to in the morning (there was a choice from about 4 different options) followed by a coffee break at 11.30. There was then another choice of lectures followed by lunch at 1.30, with an evening session following that.

The website for the 2014 event can be accessed on the [ischools website](#).

Links to all notes, papers, reports, abstracts, proceedings, poster descriptions, workshop descriptions and key note addresses can be found on the database of [the Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship \(IDEALS\)](#).

2. II. Information about your input

I attended the conference to present an academic poster entitled "'Organising Anarchy: The Forgotten Zine Archive". The poster was based on a capstone project that I and the two other librarians who attended did for our MLIS degree, in University College Dublin, Ireland.

The purpose of this study was to develop a system for maintaining and preserving a specialist collection of ephemeral material, in a non-traditional library setting. We achieved this, through the revitalisation of the Forgotten Zine Archive, Ireland's only dedicated zine archive.

The abstract to the poster presentation is as follows:

Abstract

Specialist information archives, particularly in subcultural and non-institutional settings, present special considerations of local context, cultural appropriateness and use patterns. In this poster, we describe our work developing a system of classification, cataloguing, and preservation measures in the context of Seomra Spraoi's Forgotten Zine Archive, a Dublin, Ireland-based collection of underrepresented and ephemeral cultural materials.

The goal of organizing and preserving these materials was achieved without compromising the non-commercial, do-it-yourself ethos of the materials and organization. Our actions contributed structure and method to a previously undervalued information domain, which may become important in the future as the cultural resonance of alternative media and zines in particular becomes more widely acknowledged.

To develop these systems, key aspects of the Forgotten Zine Archive were examined via a detailed user needs assessment questionnaire and approximately 3 months of weekly participant observation sessions.

The survey and observational data, viewed through lenses of existing theory and archival practices, were used to ground any practical decisions made. The collection of over 1800 zines was then

classified and cataloged based on this knowledge. Issues of preservation and digitization were also extensively considered.

Once our field work was done at Seomra, we developed a set of more generalizable considerations, contributing to existing best practices in the domain of subcultural archiving.

Through working with the Forgotten Zine Archive, we generated a set of conclusions and best practice suggestions, with potential benefit to any group, academic or otherwise, that wishes to undertake the maintenance of a similarly ephemeral collection. Catering the cataloguing process to the audience and setting is vital when dealing with alternate media, and one effective way to approach this task has been established through this project.

Keywords: non-standard information settings, sub-culture collections, DIY archives, zines

This is how the poster looked:

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Organising Anarchy

The Forgotten Zine Archive

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Mick O'Dwyer (Oireachtas Library & Research Services); Eric Cook (University of Michigan)

Introduction


As digital repositories grow, long-term research becomes easier to accommodate and overlooked materials now have a place in established memory collections as a result. Materials such as zines are no longer completely disregarded [1] and DIY archives are being created to cater to this audience [2, 3, 4]. The Forgotten Zine Archive in Dublin, Ireland, is one such archive.

The Forgotten Zine Archive

Created in 2004 and initially made up of 1200 zines (currently at over 2000 zines/other alternative publication), the archive was run out of a commercial warehouse space *semi-legally*. Little attention had been paid to long-term preservation or organisation, however, and many zines were falling apart.

Seomra Spraoi

The archive moved to Seomra Spraoi in 2005, an autonomous, non-hierarchical, anti-capitalist social centre, run on a not-for-profit basis. It runs a variety of events, such as gigs, language lessons, bike workshops, political meetings and film screenings.



The Project

Step 1: Inventory materials.
Step 2: Create subject headings - traditional subject headings proved inadequate and unnecessary, user-experience and intuitiveness was a focus.
Step 3: Classify materials - where multiple subject headings were appropriate, crossreferencing with controlled vocabulary metadata tags were used.
Step 4: Catalogue and shelf materials - polyester sleeves, backboards and file boxes were used for preservational purposes, and sticker labels for easy reference.
Step 5: Generate finding aid from inventory document - both to facilitate user searches and to outline instructions for expanding the archive in the future.

What We Found

Four key concerns for non-standard info. settings:

- 1) Managing access without jeopardizing openness.
- 2) Effective preservation of ephemeral items.
- 3) Adoption of flexible and user-friendly cataloguing standards.
- 4) Ethics of digitisation, including author wishes and copyright concerns.

Unfortunately, no clear solution for all settings exists.


Discussion

Should zines be digitised? Some zinesters want their creation to stay ephemeral; digitization is "forever" [5]. What about anonymous or uncontactable authors? Should resulting digitisation gaps be plugged? What about distance users, how would they gain access?

How much focus should be put on the physical preservation of digitised zines? If the material exists in another form and is able to be recreated, do the original documents need to be preserved? Should the focus be on keeping the digitised zines accessible or on maintaining the original physical collection?

Acknowledgements

Thanks to our collaborators: Raven Cooke, Gina O'Brien, Laura Mahoney, and Joe Peakin. Also, thanks to all those involved in Seomra Spraoi, and Eddie Pie Hands.



[1] Cohen, Sara, and Brett Loshin. "A Fastlane of Record": Merrythought and Missing Liverpool's Post-Punk Popular Musicscapes." *Punk & post-punk 1.1* (2012): 87-104. [IRAM Abstracts of Music Literature](#).

[2] Film, A. (2007). Community histories, community archives: Some opportunities and challenges. *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 28(2), 151-176.

[3] Film, A. (2011). Archival activities independent and community-led archives, radical public history and heritage professions. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 7(2).

[4] Film, A., Stevens, M., & Shephard, E. (2009). Whose memories, whose archives? Independent community archives, autonomy and the mainstreams. *Archival Science*, 9(2009), 71-86.

[5] Wortham, J. (2011). Raised on the Web, but Liking a Little Ink. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/23/business/media/zines-have-a-resurgence>

An edited version of the thesis this poster was based upon was published in the Archival Journal earlier this year:

Hamill, L.A., Maher, T., Cooke, R., O'Dwyer, M., Peakin, J., Mahoney, L and Cook, E. (2014). "Organizing Anarchy: The Revitalization and Revamp of the Forgotten Zine Archive". Issue 4. *Archival Journal*.

3. III. Highlights of the event

The main highlight of the event was the fact that we won the [best poster presentation](#) award at the 2014 iConference in Berlin. In a competition of 66 academic poster presentations, submitted by academics, professors and PHD Students, our poster on the revitalisation of a zine archive in an autonomous, anarchist space, won the award for best poster presentation. It was a surreal moment, one that I will never forget



Another highlight of the event for me was the workshop I attended on the opening day, entitled *Researchers as Makers: Exploring the Role of Making in Academic Research*

The abstract for the workshop is as follows:

“This workshop will provide a unique opportunity to consider how making and fixing, practices which frequently take place during the course of academic research, can provide unique, different and

insightful research perspectives. To actively explore the connection between making and research, each participant will be asked to create a tangible artifact prior to the workshop which will serve as an embodiment of his/her research or some aspect of this research. The term tangible artifact is used broadly here and can include artifacts produced using various mediums. The guiding questions are: 1) How can the process of making challenge us to be more self-reflective and critical about the research we are conducting? 2) Can making add a dimension of tangibility to research that is distinct from other research activities? 3) How can reflecting on making and telling stories about the making process illuminate and stimulate learning and assist in research conceptualization?"

Co-ordinated by the lovely Stephanie Santoso, this stood out from other workshops because it forced academics to think in ways many had not done in a long time. For me, the purpose of this workshop was to think of information as craft, and to learn by making things. Completely by chance, the task attendees were asked to complete was to make a zine about what they felt information was. This caught a number of academics off guard, and one could hear a few grumbings of protest (I think I heard "I didn't know I signed myself up to art class" muttered on the table beside me). However, once people began making physical objects with their hands, you could immediately sense how much everyone was enjoying it. An added benefit for us was that we got to take home the completed zines and will add them to our archive. As our poster was about creating a zine archive, it was also amazing to meet other 'zinesters' and discuss their experiences in similar archives.

In the workshop, members of the Hackerspace/Makerspace community also gave a talk to information professionals about the benefits of Makerspaces, about best practice policies and how to go about setting them up. It was really insightful, and very beneficial to anyone thinking of instigating similar projects. We also visited a Makerspace in Berlin, and were given a demonstration on 3d printing, which was amazing, and something I would like to get more experience at. The Makerspace we visited was called [the Fab Lab](#) and I highly recommend everyone living in Berlin to visit it.

On the first night of the conference there was a welcome reception in the Humboldt University. This is a beautiful old University, with some incredible stain glass windows. We spent the evening talking to fellow librarians, eating currywurst and drinking wine on the balcony overlooking Museum Island. It was a great first evening.

On day two there was a brilliant talk about online surveillance. We were told how most of the world's internet communication is now through America, and under the PRISM initiative, the US and NSA began monitoring data in a number of different ways, most notably by installing computer interceptors in locations around the world. To avoid US routing, companies and countries are proposing to build fibre optic cables, from Brazil to Europe, and from Russia to China. There are issues with the words we use and how this shapes this debate. For example, the legal definition of metadata and the actual definition of metadata are not the same. Surveillance is a jargon heavy topic. We need to build mental models in how to communicate information to people who are not familiar with the topic, so they can understand it in a publically accountable way.

That evening there was a drinks reception at the Naturkund museum. I literally ate dinner beside a stegosaurus skeleton, it was incredible.

The Thursday of the conference was the evening we had our poster presentation. For two hours we talked to anyone and everyone who was in our vicinity; about our poster and the work we have been doing with the Forgotten Zine Archive. It was tiring repeating ourselves again and again, but when you love the subject, and know the material inside-out, it makes the process far easier, and in our case, enjoyable. Directly after the poster session was the presentation of the awards for the various categories, where as I mentioned all ready, we won our award. We were presented with certificates on stage, and it felt like we had just won an Oscar. That night to celebrate we went for a beautiful dinner with some librarians from the University of Sheffield.

Another highlight of Thursday was a really interesting talk entitled "*Archives, libraries and museums in contemporary society: perspectives of the professionals*". It examined each entity, how they are linked, and the challenges each faced. Each face crisis and are going through tough times; the IT sector is taking archivists roles; libraries may not still be relevant in 10 years; could we just make all museums digital? Then there are other people who feel that is just fiction. We were told "librarians need to be the new pirates", which I thought was the phrase of the week. That librarian's see technology as a way to get people to use services, and that people are externalising problems facing libraries, when getting commercial actors to engage with libraries might be at odds with the good public service they provide. Two recent studies, one Swedish, one American, asked users and librarians what role they saw the library as fulfilling. The librarians saw the library as a progressive place; the users were much more conservative, viewing the main role of the library as being a provider of paper books/books in the printed format.

A major highlight of the week was the fact that the conference was on in Berlin. What an incredible city. That was my fourth time visiting Berlin, and I think I fall more and more in love with the city every time I visit. Everything about it is incredible; the people, the music scene, the food, the transportation system. I think I ate my weight in currywurst while I was there, it was incredible.

Finally, I really have to thank the staff at BI-International- eine Kommission von BID for giving me the grant. I would not have been able to go to the conference had I not received it. I dealt with a lady named Claudia in BI, who was one of the most helpful, friendly and kind people I have ever dealt with. She went out of her way to help me, even coming down to the conference to drop off the grant personally. I missed her at the conference, which I regretted, because I would have loved to said 'thanks' in person. So I must add a big thank you to Claudia at BI, for her professionalism, helpfulness, and all round great demeanour.

4. V. What are you taking with you from the event?

I have made some invaluable contacts at this conference, people who I have subsequently come to think of as friends, so I fell that is the main aspect of the conference that I will take with me.

I think this conference was an eye opener for me professionally. It was my first international conference, and I was not sure what to expect. For the first couple of days of it I was a bit apprehensive about participating in the discussions in the various workshops. The conference was attended by international experts, and I was unsure of how my opinions would stand up to theirs. I think I was just a bit nervous. However, after the second day I felt quite comfortable, and for the last two days I thoroughly enjoyed discussing various aspects of information, disagreeing with conference participants and stating my own claims. When I attend my next international conference

I think I will have more confidence in my own beliefs, settle in quicker, and get involved in more discussions.

I also will be looking to address the need for an open and informed discussion about internet surveillance; how it affects librarians, an issue that was brilliantly highlighted at the iConference. Librarians have always been proactive in working to protect the rights of their patrons, however in the current climate this is harder to do. I mentioned this to a librarian colleague from Sheffield who also attended, and she advised me of a conference that just happened in Leeds called the Radical Librarians unconference. At that conference they discussed the role of the librarian as an activist, and I will attend this conference when it is on again in the future. If it had not been for attending iConference I would not have known there was a real interest in this issue internationally, for librarians. I also hope to give a talk about this issue in an Irish conference, and see if we can come up with any best practices for how Irish librarians can address this issue.