

# Bibliothekskongress Leipzig 2016

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## Introduction (Vorwort)

With an Honours Degree in German and as a qualified Chartered Librarian, what could be better than the opportunity to attend the *Bibliothekskongress* (German Library Congress) in Leipzig? Not only that, but this was the three-yearly special event, the International Congress, where the *Bibliothek und Information Deutschland* (BID - German Library Association) would welcome its new partner country, the USA. So, bigger and better, and with a very real international feel.

I was there representing the UK's *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals* (CILIP), specifically as a committee member of their *International Library and Information Group* (ILIG).

As well as this, I particularly wanted to learn about the role of German Libraries in welcoming refugees, to support and inform my day-to-day work as Network Librarian with High Life Highland in Inverness, Scotland.

Of course, the prospect of being able to improve my German language skills, in the context of my profession, also appealed.

## Bibliothek & Information International (BI-International)

Let me say straight away that, on a practical level, I am extremely grateful for the vision of BI- International.

*“to ... promote international dialogue and Europe- and world-wide cooperation in the field of library and information activities”*



This stated aim enabled me personally to attend the Conference in Leipzig, and thus to liaise and learn from professional colleagues from not only Germany but, as an added bonus, from other parts of the world as well.

I was delighted to learn that Bibliothek & Information International (BII) had offered me a generous grant to meet expenses while attending the Conference. I would have endeavoured to attend anyway, but financially this made all the difference.

On behalf of ILIG, I was pleased to be able to bring greetings to the BII team, and to Susanne Riedel in particular, from our own committee members. Having worked with her in the past, ILIG was very happy to endorse my visit to Leipzig this year; it was a pleasure to strengthen our German ties by meeting her in person by being able to participate at the Congress.

## **Congress – Initial Impressions (Erste Eindrücke vom Kongress)**

Arrangements and briefing before the event were very well organised; everything was thought of; it was clearly exceptionally well planned; just as you would expect from a librarians' event! The Congress app was invaluable for planning what to attend, as well as for keeping a personal record of events and contacts.

This certainly made it much easier to navigate my way through the bustle and noise of the first morning's arrival – I didn't even need to queue to register, because this had all previously been taken care of online. The scale of the event was immediately apparent, and could have been quite overwhelming, but all I had to do was pick up my conference goodie bag, enter through the turnstiles, and locate (eventually) the first session of the day, the International Welcome.

## **International Librarian's Orientation**

An added benefit was the thoughtful invitation to attend the International Librarian's Orientation on the morning of the first day; this meant that, instead of being left completely to my own devices to find my way around, I was immediately put at ease and given a friendly and warm introduction, as part of a group of other international delegates. Straight away I was able to make contact with and chat to like-minded people. Other nationalities represented included a lady from France, and one other delegate from the UK, both of whom were involved in presentations later in the week; I immediately knew that these two were allies and on the same wavelength as myself.

Also, it was lovely to be there as the **Guests of Honour**, the American delegation, were welcomed. Of course, this was in English, and I was there to practice my German; actually, I hadn't really intended to go out of my way to get to know the American librarians (again, because my main aim was to discover more about the world of German libraries), but in practice, this ended up being one of the nicest things about the whole Conference. I'd gone to learn about Germany, but ended up learning so much more.

## **Lectures and Seminars (Vorträge und Veranstaltungen)**

Most of us attended the Opening Ceremony. It brought with it a sense of occasion, but the downside was that it overran.

After that, there was a wealth of subjects to choose from over the following few days, and I did make the time to pick and mix a few sessions that reflected my work at home with school. I was surprised to learn that many German schools do not have a library at all, so I was left with the impression that we are much further ahead back home. Like many Network Librarians in Highland, I am based in a school library, and play an integral role in reader development and information skills across the school curriculum. At least for the time being, professionally qualified librarians are still valued in Highland schools, although across Scotland many have been under threat of job cuts, leaving school libraries to be run by non-qualified staff. Ideally, I would like to have followed this up, but that was not my main focus this time. I would have been delighted if there had been a delegate from our twin town of Augsburg, to discuss a link, but on this occasion it was not to be.

## Willkommenskultur

These were the presentations I had come to hear, and they did not disappoint. Providing well-informed background and statistics, they reflected on the role of libraries in welcoming refugees. Some of the examples of best practice were just super, and I came away with a wealth of information and practical ideas for implementation at home.

*“Libraries are vital centres for diverse populations including immigrants, refugees and multi-lingual people”*

Garcia-Febo Loida

(<http://loidagarciafebo.com>) led the first session with an inspiring presentation which served to set the tone for the rest of the

Congress. She shared core principles and guidelines, as well as examples of best practice from around the globe. Entitled ***Saving lives: library services to diverse populations***, her presentation threw down the gauntlet as a challenge for all professional librarians to consider how their own libraries might be called upon to make a vital difference. We were reminded of Article 19 of the ***Universal Declaration of Human Rights***, which states:

*“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”*

Target 16.10 of the Declaration directly involves all libraries, and is an undeniable call to action:

*“Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”*



I had not realised that IFLA is on a par with UNESCO, and so was delighted to learn from the President herself that she had led a team promoting information literacy at the highest level. Her team’s negotiations led to this being included as a fundamental building block in every single Sustainability Goal. Such is the influence of well informed and feisty librarians when they are on the move.

With so much to choose from there was inevitably some disappointment when some events clashed. The one that mattered was the Monday afternoon session of *Willkommenskultur* and IFLA’s *‘Where are we now in Library Services for Refugees’*. I opted to miss the IFLA one in favour of the German libraries, but would very much have liked to hear first-hand what the IFLA representatives had to say from the global perspective.

Later in the week was part two of these sessions, and these turned out to be the best of all. The session from Susanne Brandt (Büchereizentrale Schleswig-Holstein) about *‘Silent Books,’*



which focused on the IBBY project *'Silent Books – Final Destination Lampedusa.'* was of particular practical interest to me. Having done some work with silent books before, I could immediately see the possibilities, both for children at school with learning difficulties, but also from a public library perspective.

[http://www.ibby.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/silent\\_books\\_Lampedusa\\_Exhibition\\_catalogue.pdf](http://www.ibby.org/fileadmin/user_upload/silent_books_Lampedusa_Exhibition_catalogue.pdf)

Pictures speak many languages, and these books without words can help to overcome barriers and play a vital empathetic role, for all ages, and not least with those who have suffered trauma, find themselves in a country with a new language, and need a medium to express how they feel. My German language skills were keeping pace, so I even stepped up to the microphone and asked a question.

*"Silent books ... providing a bridge to the world around us, when words cannot express the way we feel."*

The other two presentations on that final afternoon focused on multicultural libraries. The first was a project from Duisburg: ***Ankommen in Deutschland*** (Arrival in Germany). The librarian, Yilmaz Holtz-Ersahin, is himself, a Turkish immigrant. He was delightful; with some very informative statistics, and a disarming smile, he won us all over with his enthusiasm. Duisburg has over 40 years of experience as an intercultural library, and now regularly attracts adult learners too, especially from the Turkish community. On offer are a range of themed resources and information booklets in many languages. With the number of Syrian refugees rising steadily, Duisburg has been ready. And, since 2011, there has also been a dedicated *Internationale Kinderbibliothek* (International Children's Library). With 5000 items, mostly dual language, this seeks to appeal to indigenous German children as well as those from other lands. A whole range of activities, for all ages, happens here in this vibrant library.

Lastly, but by no means least, the ***Kinderbücherei der Weltsprachen*** (The children's world library in Vienna) was, for me, quite possibly the highlight of the Congress. The aim is to keep

*"for children must first understand their mother tongue in order to better understand themselves and the world around them."*

international children reading when they do not have access to books in their own first language. So they set about transforming a branch library, asking for donations, and working with an organisation called *'Who I Am'* who shared the vision. They are well on their way to achieving the goal of 100 titles in each of the 30 target languages, and various events and programmes have captured the hearts and minds of the community.

*"Research shows that children who gain literacy in their own mother tongue will ultimately learn their host language better"*

This lovely new library, describing itself as the *bunteste Büchereizweigstelle Wiens* (the most colourful branch library in Vienna) seems to me to have achieved its aspiration to be a role-model:

*"... setting new standards for cross-cultural libraries and anyone responsible for the provision of resources"*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q99jSpT8NVY&feature=youtu.be>

Part of my remit for the public library in Inverness is to develop our welcoming multicultural ethos, and be a recognised place where people from a variety of language and cultural backgrounds can feel at home. The willingness is there, but we need to think of new, more effective ways to encourage people to use our space. The Viennese example shows what can be achieved when like-minded organisations work together with and on behalf the local community. Of course, our population is tiny in comparison, and we have not had the influx of immigrants that Vienna has had to contend with, but nonetheless, the numbers are growing in Highland too (school supporting children with 62 mother languages!), and, with the first Syrian refugee families soon to arrive here, we need to be ready, even on a smaller scale, to provide the famous Highland welcome in the library context.

Our dual-language stock at present is leased on a short-term basis, to ensure circulation of a variety of stock without the financial commitment of purchasing for seemingly small sub-sections of the population; this, however, means that there is not much to choose from at any given time. I was, therefore, particularly interested to hear how well the Viennese donation scheme has worked. Under normal circumstances, encouraging donations can be '*a pig in a poke*' (more trouble than it is worth), but I would like to persuade my senior colleagues that, in this case, with such specialised dual and foreign language stock, and with the right parameters in place an experiment might well be the way forward. I would like to think that this would at the same time engender in the potential donors a sense of ownership of 'their' multi-lingual library.

### **IFLA - Strategic Directions and Goals and the Role of Librarians (Strategien der IFLA)**

The icing on the Congress cake was the IFLA connection. I have for a long time been interested in IFLA, so this was an expected bonus. Their presentations were informative and inspiring and it was a pleasure to meet the President, Donna Scheeder.



Libraries have a responsibility to protect and promote cultural heritage. The other UK delegate is a committee member of *IFLA Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section*, and from her I learnt more about the IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto and accompanying Toolkit at <http://www.ifla.org/node/8976>. This is something concrete that I can take forward and present as a framework to my senior colleagues. I have to admit that I am now considering membership of IFLA, and this Section in particular.

What I hadn't been aware of was how IFLA offers practical global guidelines and standards for public libraries, to arm the smallest library at local level. Annie Dourlent (Bibliothèque Centre Pompidou) IFLA committee member in the Public Libraries section, raised awareness of IFLA's high standing, and showed how a working knowledge of its manifestos can help to support libraries worldwide; it may even provide some political leverage at local government level in times of financial cuts, as is the case back in Scotland, and across the UK. This Section also offers what they describe as the Ultimate Guide for Librarians:

*"1001 Libraries to see before you die"* (<http://www.ifla.org/node/8734>)

## American Library Association (ALA)



Although I had wanted to focus on developing German links, the extra bonus was learning more about the ALA; its scale is vast compared to our UK equivalent, CILIP. There is even an International Relations Office with a full-time Director. ILIG is a tiny by comparison – but I would like to think that our enthusiasm for global librarianship nonetheless matches theirs.

### The Extras (Sonstiges)

In just a few days I could only hope to scratch the surface of what Leipzig has to offer, but it captivated me.

*“Leipzig: arguably Germany’s historical capital of music, literature and books.”*

My initial game plan had been to attend as many seminars as possible, but I soon realised that this was the way to information overload, and that it would be far better to take some time out to enjoy the bigger picture, and the town itself. So instead, I joined the Americans one morning on a visit to the **Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** (German National Library). This was a fascinating peep behind the scenes and of interest in particular to my UK colleague, Adjoa K Boateng, who holds responsibility for the British Library Reference collections. They hold 30 million items, and every day the collection grows by over 2,000 books, both physical and online.

The *Deutsches Buch- und Schriftmuseum* (German Museum of Books and Writing) is firmly on the agenda for our next visit to Leipzig.

As if we hadn’t already been well enough looked after, Leipzig’s Oberbürgermeister issued all the international librarians with an invitation to attend a reception at the Rathaus, where he welcomed the American delegation, in particular in both German and English.

The official party over, next on the social programme was the Kongress party at the Moritzbastei. This had been an optional, ticket-only event, and well worth paying for; after what had already been a very busy and full couple of days, this was a lovely, informal evening, where we could all take time to relax.

As the Kongress came to an end, the Buchmess (Book Fair) began. And it would have been inexcusable to miss this. What an experience, what a scale, and what a buzz, with events and performances happening all over the town – an estimated 3,000 readings!

My final morning was spent meandering through the town centre, with its charming inner courtyards and passages. I paid homage to Bach at the Thomaskirche, and spent time just sitting in the Nikolaikirche, reflecting on its recent history. It was a delightfully sunny morning, but it passed all too quickly, and soon it was time to head back to the railway station (fascinating in its own right) for the long journey home. I very much hope to be back before long.

### Follow Up (Weiterverfolgung)

Very helpfully, all the presentations have been made available online via the *BIB Opus Publikationsserver* (<http://www.bib-info.de/verband/publikationen/opus.html>). This has enabled

me not only to revisit presentations, but also to browse those others that there was no time to attend during the Congress itself.

This is a super resource, and a great way to develop a more extensive knowledge of German vocabulary in the context of my profession. Further browsing has led me to previous years' presentations, still stored on the server; following the **IFLA** search results, for example, has provided even more information about ethics, welcoming migrants, and the huge benefits of linking globally as librarians. This is indeed proving to be a valuable source of peer-mediated professional expertise and experience.

Since the Congress, I have found myself coming back to *Bibliothek & Information International* (BII) to glean further information about German libraries. The flyer featured on the BII website, "*Welcome to Germany – Libraries as Hosts*", has led me to discover both the **German Libraries Portal** and the **Kompetenznetzwerk for Bibliotheken** (KnB - Network of Excellence for Libraries, which I am looking forward to exploring further.

[http://www.bi-international.de/download/file/knb\\_englisch\\_flyer\\_05.pdf](http://www.bi-international.de/download/file/knb_englisch_flyer_05.pdf)

<http://www.bibliotheksportal.de/>

Having taken away several business cards from the Congress, my intention is to liaise further with colleagues, to learn more about their own libraries in general, to foster a working relationship with some in particular, and with one or two people, to develop firm friendships. One of these will be from the UK, several will be German, and a couple may be further afield, even American!

### **Conclusion (Abschluss)**

To conclude, I really hadn't expected so many boxes to be ticked at this Kongress.

From my own **personal** goals (the German language and making acquaintances), to **local** aims (forging new working relationships and bringing back workable ideas to implement in my own library), to **national** (representing ILIG) and **global** (the community of librarians worldwide).

It was a privilege to attend.

My grateful thanks are extended to the team at **Bibliothek & Information International**, and especially to Susanne Riedel, as well as my colleagues at ILIG, for their support.

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