

## Brief Report

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### Pre-IFLA Satellite Meeting in Mons, Belgium, 17–19 August 2023

Ahead of this year's session of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), a satellite meeting was organized in Mons from August 17 to 19, 2023, the topic of which is extremely important not only for IFLA, but also for other professional organizations and institutions in the field of librarianship, documentation, information science, archival science and museology. Namely, IFLA's Library History Special Interest Group prepared, and with the support of the Mundaneum successfully held a three-day Satellite meeting. The main topic was the preservation of the origins and development of professional organizations under the title "Preserving our origins: approaches to the organization, curation, and historiography of the record of national and international organizations in libraries, information, and documentation".

The Mundaneum Museum, located in Mons, Belgium, was an excellent host that provided not only the conditions for work and collegial socializing, but also organized a tour of the Museum, an introduction and screening of the Françoise Levie's film about Paul Otlet, which pays tribute to the ideas of its founders Otlet and La Fontaine.

The main goals of the Satellite meeting as announced were:

- 1) to contribute to the understanding of the state of preservation and availability of historical sources for the historiography of librarianship and organizations in the wider field of information sciences and technology;
- 2) to lay the foundations for further research into the history of organizations in the broader field of information sciences, from their beginnings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the present day.

The intention of the working group that designed the program (Anna Maria Tamaro, Steven Witt, Jenny Bossaller, Peter Lor, Debby Schlachter and Tatjana Aparac-Jelušić) was, among other things, to focus on digitization and curatorial programs in order to make the historically valuable sources visible and accessible. It was also expected that the Satellite could be an important contribution to preparations for the celebration of IFLA's 100th anniversary. Ten papers were accepted. The speakers were representatives of IFLA's working group, of the Association for Information Science and Information Technologies (ASIST), The American Library Association (ALA), the Japanese Library Association, Australian and New Zealand school libraries (KBANZSL), the Vatican Library, and individuals dealing with historical topics.

There were two esteemed keynote speakers, Alistair Black and W. Boyd Rayward, both holding the title of Professor Emeritus of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. They presented the results of their recent research.

In his talk titled “Memory and amnesia in the archival practices of the world’s library and information associations, with a case study of arrangements made by the UK’s Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)” A. Black warned about the noticeable gaps or inadmissible amnesia when it comes to recording one’s own history. He reminded the audience of the 2005 IFLA’s Library History Section survey of the archival holdings and policies of the national library associations worldwide, that was conducted in order “to establish the extent to which associations retain a memory, in terms of collections of their internally generated records”. His case study revealed shortcomings and oversights “in CILIP’s discharging of its archiving responsibilities over the past two decades, demonstrating that the potential for corporate amnesia in this regard is never far away”. He concluded that a large-scale study is required to assess the archival collections and policies of the world’s library and information associations – to establish, in short, the balance that exists between memory retention and amnesia in such organizations.

In his talk titled “The emergence of a Post-World War II international information order: international associations, inter-governmental agencies, political platforms and technological affordances” B. Rayward pointed out to the sources that speak in favour of the developed archival practices of the world’s library and information associations. According to Rayward the surveyed period saw the growing need “to mobilise information as a key component of post-war planning to support and develop but also manage the international tensions of the new world order that was emerging from the chaotic conditions of the War.” He particularly emphasized the importance of the UNESCO, the role of IFLA, FID, and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU). In his opinion, the whole period was characterized by “something like a world information order, based on the coordinated work of international associations, as envisaged by Paul Otlet”. However, despite the efforts, these ideas and programs “were overtaken by a constantly accelerating impetus for change in information organisations, systems and services of which they had been part of”. His conclusions were that such growing changes reflected the dynamism of the international political configurations, especially those related to the development of relations between the two opposing blocks, and that the emerging mass commercialization was aimed at the maximum exploitation of digital technologies.

Cara S. Bertram (Archives Program Officer, American Library Association Archives, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) presented a paper “Preserving the History of the Oldest Library Association: A Report from the American Library Association Archives” in which she talked about the official repository of the American Library Association (ALA) that was established in 1973 at the University of Illinois by the then University Archivist Maynard Brichford. The Archives now holds over a terabyte of digital content and nearly 4,000 cubic feet of official records, personal papers, and publications created by or relating to the ALA, its members,

and the history of librarianship. The collection spans from a scrapbook on the 1853 Librarians Convention to born-digital documents produced by the ALA members today. The Archives supports the research of ALA staff and members, along with an increasing number of scholars, students, and the public from across the United States and around the world.

Paola Castellucci's talk focused on the research and documentation in Italy at the turn of the Century, and in particular on the thirty years of the ISRDS (Institute for Advanced Research and Documentation Studies), which was the driving force behind the important choices – technological, cultural, political – that affected not only the field of documentation but the entire Nation. She pointed out to the role of Paolo Bisogno, the founder and director of the ISRDS and author of the *Teoria della documentazione* (1979), who put documentation at the centre of the research ecosystem. Bisogno proposed a disciplinary status based on a threefold epistemological foundation: Logic, Linguistics and Computer Science, envisioning that Documentation theory and Documentation technologies are the forces that converge to ensure welfare. She also reminded that in Italy it is still common to hear the question *What is Documentation?*

Mary Carroll and her associates Kasey Garrison, Simon Wakeling, Kay Oddone and Sue Reynolds from the School of Information and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Education, Charles Sturt University, Australia, reported on the efforts to document the development of the profession of school librarians in Australia and New Zealand. They presented the project “Knowledge Bank of Australian and New Zealand School libraries (KBANZSL)” and its main goal: to provide finding aids for non-journal literature, to inform practitioners, support research and to ensure that the intellectual output of a small but important sector of librarianship is not lost or forgotten. The project's intention was to capture the intellectual and practice-based output of the school library and teacher librarian sector in Australia and New Zealand from 1900 to the present.

The next presentation was given by Peter Lor titled “IFLA in the international arena before the Second World War: evidence provided by the proceedings of IFLA's annual meetings, generally known by their initial French title of *Actes du Comité International des Bibliothèques* (published under various titles from 1931 to 1968) and the digitized League of nations archives”.

Inoue, Yasuyo talked about the “International Influence over Japan Library Association and librarians before the World War 2” focusing on the relationship between the Japan Library Association and a number of international, mostly European library and documentation associations.

In her talk “A narrative of the codebreakers' library at Bletchley Park” Matilde Fontanin (Trieste University Library, Italy) stressed the importance of the Bletchley Park project as a very meaningful site for the history of information science. A reflection was offered on the nature and organisation of documents that can be used to study and narrate the history of libraries, and what the uncovering of that history may mean for the profession.

The talk entitled “Navigating the Vatican Library institutional records: A valuable source on cooperation and dialogue” presented by Raffaella Vincenti (General Secretary of the Vatican Library since 2012) discussed the current and historical Archive of the Vatican Library as a valuable source of information related to the history of LIS.

The final presentation given by Jenny Bossaller and Tatjana Aparac-Jelušić titled “The Fragility of the historical record and current efforts to ease historical work” focused on the approaches and efforts of the ASIST History Committee and the Curator to offer the model on how to make the documents of historical value more visible and accessible. They also stressed the importance of making the ASIST members aware of the need for systematic recording and preservation of records of their own professional association.

As Professor Black reminded, the national library and information associations “are in essence meta-history, or meta-memory, organizations, in that one of their roles – perhaps their primary role – is to oversee and enable the preservation of accumulated knowledge and cultural heritage in a variety of library and information institutions. Yet the efforts of associations to secure their own history and protect their corporate memory – and by inference the professional memory – for the future, especially in terms of safeguarding their internal archives, appear patchy”. Having this in mind, the twenty or so participants engaged in discussion and agreed on the next steps towards a common research methodology to standardize the approach to creating databases of historical sources, and to ensure conducting interviews with meritorious librarians as part of IFLA’s 100th anniversary celebration.

A notice for those who are interested in the aforementioned topic is that the presentations will be prepared for a special issue of the IFLA Journal.

About the Meeting: <http://expositions.mundaneum.org/en/conference/preserving-our-origins-world-library-and-information-congress>.

Tatjana Aparac-Jelušić