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Back Talk — Reflections about Consortia-world



Column Editors: **Ann Okerson** (Advisor on Electronic Resources Strategy, Center for Research Libraries) <aokerson@gmail.com>

I had not been to Oslo for many years and was delighted by the city I found in October 2015. But the biggest surprise came when I was leaving. I had a few Norwegian kroner left in my wallet, perhaps ten dollars' worth, and I handed them to a Norwegian colleague (**Kjell Tjensvoll**, the meeting organizer): "more use to you than me," I said. He was plainly embarrassed. "We don't actually use cash much here in Norway," he replied, "but I guess I can figure out something to do with this money." It seems that Norwegians pay for everything with debit or credit cards: tram fares, cups of coffee, you name it. I suggested that next time he is in the U.S., he could buy me a glass of wine!

That transaction was a reminder that new ways of living in a technology-rich world don't necessarily start in the U.S.: that insight was also a good way to close that particular trip to the semi-annual meeting of **ICOLC** (the **International Coalition of Library Consortia**), one of today's most forward-looking library groups, possibly one of the less well-known.

An informal, highly collegial, unincorporated organization, **ICOLC** brings together library consortia from many parts of the world, with the aim to strengthen libraries. Consortia support libraries in so many ways, especially by leveraging buying power, securing better prices, streamlining the mechanics of dealing with vendors, and providing many other services of high value to their members. Consortia can be most successful when they group like with like — geographical neighbors, institutions of similar mission, disciplinary emphasis, that sort of thing. In a constantly changing world of technologies and business plans — and the very identities of many of the entities that we need to deal with — we can always use more help.

That's where **ICOLC** comes in. Launched in 1997 through the leadership of **Tom Sanville** (then leading **OhioLINK**) as an extremely informal gathering of like-minded individuals, this remarkable organization will soon be celebrating its 20th anniversary. The early meetings (the very first official meeting was held in

St. Louis in 1997) were particularly exciting in many ways, and it quickly became obvious that our group needed to continue to meet and talk. Casually, we designated ourselves as the **COC** (Consortium of Consortia) and took turns hosting conferences at our home institutions every six months or so.

At those meetings we shared war stories, techniques, challenges, strategies, and plans. Particularly in the early days, negotiating advantageous deals with big publishers, new publishers, and publishers with a new story to tell was challenging for all. Rapidly, we realized that our meetings were a great opportunity to invite interesting and challenging information providers to attend "grill sessions" and talk candidly with us — and the vendors realized that we were an influential group of their best customers, so they were pretty willing to attend for their allocated hour-long slot. Within those off-the-record conversations, all participants enjoyed information exchange that is unheard of in standard library conferences. It would be hard to prove absolutely that much short-term pricing advantage came to members from this work, but the creation of an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust advanced library goals for less restrictive contracts, more generous terms of use, and a focus on building longer-term relationships.

Soon enough it became clear that consortia were forming and operating in many countries and facing similar needs and challenges. After an informal first overwater meeting in 1999, the Consortium of Consortia participants agreed to become the more broadly based and ambitious **International Coalition of Library Consortia**, and so began a regular pattern of meeting in spring in the U.S. and in fall in Europe. The same issues and opportunities present themselves worldwide, and vendors turn out to be very much interested in meeting with the international group. Hence the Oslo meeting last October!

As usual with **ICOLC** meetings, Oslo had two-and-a-half full and busy days of meet-

ings, supplemented by group meals in which the conversations were as important and rich as in the formal sessions. Sure, we made time around the edges to do a small bit of tourism, for example, past the spectacular new waterfront opera house and a curious floating island of postmodern glass sculpture. But, mainly, **ICOLC** meetings are distinctive for the focus and intensity that all participants seem to bring to every session.

By now, approximately about 100 (more or less) consortial staff and representatives attend a given meeting. These days, though we invite fewer vendors, we still find the ones we do talk with to be well worth the invitation. One reason for the decline in publisher invitations is the routinization of business with many of the largest ones, with whom consortia have built up productive relationships over time; another is that there are many emerging needs and opportunities to discuss amongst ourselves, not just licensing and dealing. But, for example in Oslo, **Derk Haank**, the CEO of **Springer Nature**, described to us the aims of the new organization and discussed the *Compact*, a type of new publisher consortial agreement that factors in APCs as well as subscription payments. And we also reviewed the impact on collecting policy of the increasing pace of movement to Open Access. With whom are we dealing and what are we getting for our money? Are savings really possible? **Ralf Schimmer** (**Max Planck Institute**) presented a paper about the costs and process for flipping subscriptions to open access, much as is already being done with the **SCOAP³** particle physics global consortium project. There was much more, including plenaries featuring consortial presentations from developing countries, as well as breakout discussion sessions.

In the course of **ICOLC's** history, there have been striking points of intervention, wherein the organization crafts and endorses a statement of principles on a burning issue of the day. Serials pricing, the Google books settlement, and the impact of the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 have been among the topics addressed. Several of the Statements have received good play in the media, but it's equally valuable that the Statements provide summaries of best practices that consortial leaders can take back to their members, and that library members can use to inform their own administrations and funders. The Statements have been remarkable for a lack of partisanship or grandstanding, offering well-informed professional perspectives from a broad and diverse group of institutions — all the more valuable for that reason.

By 2000, the **ICOLC** Website listed 135 member groups. In 2000, 2/3 of the member consortia were in the U.S.; that percentage

continued on page 77

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Back Talk from page 78

fell modestly to 60%, but added members from 44 other countries. At present, 175 consortia are fully represented on the ICOLC Website with descriptions of their functions. Numbers fluctuate somewhat as some groups do fade in purpose, while others consolidate and combine. Consortia are also very different creatures from one another, depending on focus and extent. The largest has almost 1,000 members; most have a few to a few dozen.

As ICOLC nears its 20th, it faces a significant transition. **Tom Sanville**, after his move to **Lyrasis** a few years back, retired at the end of 2014, and ICOLC representatives are depending more than ever on the volunteer efforts of colleagues in the group. After a series of participatory structural discussions online and at the Albany (April 2015) and Oslo (October 2015) meetings, a coordinating committee of nine members (currently **Rick Burke**, **Teresa Costa**, **Celeste Feather**, **Kirsten Leonard**, **Craig Olsvik**, **Ann Okerson**, **Anne Osterman**, **Kjell Tjensvoll**, and **Glenn Truran**) is providing and divvying up the sorts of roles that were previously handled by **Tom**. Emphasis and discussion are shifting into areas such as eBooks, discovery, currency fluctuation, promoting ICOLC outreach and partnerships. We are learning not only how challenging it is to replace **Tom** (seems to take a village!) but also about the effort required to minimize organizational weight and bureaucracy, to remain the light-weight and productive organization of the past 19 years.

We invite you to learn more about this remarkable, sometimes under-the-radar group and if you are in a library, to support actively your consortial leaders. If you're an information or service provider, keep us in mind for conversations and possible partnerships. And if you staff a consortium focused on providing the best possible service to your libraries, please join us — be prepared to work for the benefit of libraries everywhere.

Recommendations for further reading:

ICOLC Website: <http://icolc.net>

ICOLC in Wikipedia, by **Ann Okerson** and **Kathy Perry**: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Coalition_of_Library_Consortia

ICOLC overview article by **Celeste Feather**. "The International Coalition of Library Consortia: origins, contributions, and path forward: <http://insights.uksg.org/articles/10.1629/uksg.260/> 🌳

Wandering the Web from page 76

use all of the letters and lesson plans for any grade levels, but most of the instructional tools and suggestions are more appropriate for primary graders than ones in intermediate and/or middle grade levels.

Utah Education Network — <http://www.uen.org/themepark/liberty/japanese.shtml> — offers some useful Web links for the information about Japanese Americans during WWII. The links are grouped into five categories (1) Places To Go, (2) People To See, (3) Things To Do, (4) Teacher Resources, and (5) Bibliography. The information on this Website is especially useful for people who cannot visit some of the sites and museums physically due to a long distance. Another unique characteristic is that this Website also describes German Americans and Italian Americans who were also placed in the U.S. internment camps during WWII.

Ten Internment Camps for Japanese Americans during WWII

Ten internment camps existed in the U.S. during WWII. You will be able to access more specific information about each of these internment camps through clicking on the following Web links:

Amache, Colorado — <http://www.amache.org>

Gila River, Arizona — <http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/japan/gila.html>

Heart Mountain, Wyoming — <http://www.heartmountain.org>



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Jerome, Arkansas — http://www.intheirwords.org/the_home_front_experience/internment_camps/jerome_internment_camp
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Poston, Arizona — http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/anthropology74/ce10.htm

Rohwer, Arkansas — http://www.intheirwords.org/the_home_front_experience/internment_camps/rohwer_internment_camp
Topaz, Utah — <http://www.heartmountain.org>
Tule Lake, California — <http://www.tulelake.org/history.html>

Conclusion

Theses Websites are not a comprehensive collection of historical overviews and experiences of Japanese Americans' internment camps during WWII. Although the main focus of each Website somewhat varies, as one of the most important findings, I discovered that most of these sites offered the teaching tools, instructional materials and/or lesson plans regarding Japanese Americans during WWII.

A number of historical fictional stories describing their ancestry and experiences during WWII are widely available nowadays. However, we should not ignore the gap that exists between the information from these stories and the truths from each of the personal stories and experiences. Although eliminating the gap is almost impossible, through exploring these specialized Websites as an initial step, we may possibly narrow the gap and minimize the misunderstanding toward Japanese Americans and their history, rethink and reevaluate our own responsibility as the U.S. citizens and/or residents, and further educate ourselves as teachers and/or librarians. It goes without saying, expanding background knowledge about a particular topic such as Japanese Americans invariably helps us understand related stories better, and ultimately, it also helps us and our students understand the cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity that exists in this country further better in the future. 🌳