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Back Talk — Come Flash With Me! (at IFLA 2017)

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Picture this: You're in the central market square of Wrocław, Poland, the former Prussian Breslau, all lovely 17th century buildings, most now housing cafes that spill out into the square in the pleasant summer months. You're minding your own business, and perhaps you've just been buying pralines in **E. Wendel**, the best chocolatier in town — but something seems a little odd. Who are these people, wandering around in front of the handsome public library, brandishing books and phones and tablets, muttering to themselves? You look a little closer and you realize they're *reading*, and about the time you realize this, they all suddenly stop in place, while a videographer passes back and forth among them. Say what??

What you've just blundered into is a librarians' flash mob, gathering by prearrangement to capture public attention and to celebrate libraries and reading. The instructions went something like this: "WLIC-goers should appear in the Square in the general vicinity of the library at the stated time — and on the time start walking about the square, reading aloud from a book or eBook, in the language of their choice. After about ten minutes, watch for the leaders and freeze in place when they do, books in hands."

OK, yes, as someone said, **Beethoven** flash mobs at least have tympani and French horns, and librarians are, well, *quiet*, but it's nonetheless an energizing idea.

(The **Polish National Library** made a video, of course: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEU_HuCXmx4)

This actually happened to you if you were in the Wrocław city center around midday on Saturday, August 19th, of **IFLA's** annual **World Library and Information Congress**,

which was headquartered a couple of miles away at Centennial Hall, built in 1913 to celebrate a century of liberation from **Napoleon**. Knowing international librarianship, you'd have known that the people wandering and muttering looked like Congress delegates — globally and richly diverse, of all ages, reading in all kinds of formats. Though it was **IFLA's** always-zany **New Professionals Special Interest Group** that sponsored and organized the flash mob, all participants were committed to the difference that libraries make. (Another showcase for **IFLA** diversity is always in its Tuesday cultural evening, in which delegates and guests dance till midnight!)

IFLA does its work through five divisions, led by over 60 committees and special interest groups that stay in working touch through the year and then sponsor public programs at the Congress, mixing that kind of hard work with socialization, library tours, and a little frank tourism. Wrocław is a handsome mid-sized city, a Polish post-communist success story. The progressive and inspirational mayor, **Rafal Dutkiewicz**, in office since 2002 and regularly re-elected, came to greet delegates, and we learned a bit about the impressive community and business revival he has led. The city sits on the Oder River and offers handsome views, numerous parks, excellent eateries, boat tours, and warm hospitality.

As always, the **WLIC** programs are too numerous to attend. I'll mention a couple of collections-related highlights, which could just

as easily have been in place at the **Charleston Conference**:

- Three committees (Metropolitan Libraries, Public Libraries, and Acquisitions/Collection Development) sponsored a program about "Unique Circulating Collections," including loaning "Internet in a box," circulating art in a remote Finnish town, providing petting zoos, lending clothing, and much more. Who knew?

The Acquisition & Collection Development Section's open program, chaired by the talented and multi-lingual **Lidia Uziel** (Head of **Harvard University Library's** Western Languages Division), headlined case studies in the building of large digital libraries and their impact on local library activities. For example, we learned from **Agnieszka Leszyska** (**National Library of Poland**) of Poland's effort to build a centralized Polish digital library, which then devolved into a series of regional digital collections. In a media-rich presentation, **Harry Verwayen** described the **Europeana Project's** strategy, and the audience was particularly taken with the use

of young Ambassadors to promote and support public awareness of this major effort. **Jean-Luc Jankowski** described a significant partnership between the **BNF** (**Bibliothèque Nationale de France**) and **Flatirons Jouve** to build a contemporary national digital book library, which then could not be properly realized because of legal

and ownership disputes. **Lynn Wiley** (**University of Illinois**) described some key impacts of **HathiTrust** on the work and flows of her library. The Committee hopes to expand on this topic at the 2018 **WLIC**.

Donna Scheeder, long a pillar of the **Congressional Research Service** in the **Library of Congress**, was completing at this **Congress** a successful two-year term as **IFLA's** elected president, now succeeded by **Glòria Pérez-Salmerón**, former Director of **Spain's National Library**. (Immediate predecessors have come from Germany, South Africa, Canada, and Finland.) The hallmark of **Scheeder's** term has been, while working closely with **IFLA's** Secretary General **Gerald Leitner**, the patient and broad-based building of a global visioning process designed to concentrate the attention of librarians and supporters and build commitment to shared action for promoting the broadest possible access to knowledge and freedom in its use, in



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questions relating to the future of the changing roles of publishers, libraries, research societies, and life in a post-truth world. **David Crotty**, Editor of *TSK*, began with the changing role of publishers¹⁰ and said that content providers have noticed that there may be value in supporting research workflows and university business processes. Publishers are currently shifting from being simply content providers to becoming a full service industry. An article's metadata may be more valuable than its content; if being a content creator is no longer a viable business, what will publishers become? What services can publishers offer to provide value to the research community and can smaller publishers compete in this new market?

Todd Carpenter, Executive Director of **NISO**, addressed the changing role of libraries and said that library expenditures and salaries are exceeding inflation.¹¹ Students are at their limits and unable to borrow any more money, so the only area for growth is endowments, which many institutions do not have. If funding for government research is cut in future years and student debt continues to grow, we can expect that libraries' fiscal positions will be severely limited. Some pressing current issues that must be addressed by libraries include:

- Libraries are misaligned with their institutions. What is their current role? Do they have enough influence to ensure their position within the institution?
- Libraries seem to be one of the few communities that are deeply committed to privacy. Where more and more services are becoming customized, where does that leave the library? Have they gotten privacy considerations all wrong?¹²
- What is a library today and what are libraries' core services? How an institution defines its libraries will have major impacts on their future in the next decade.

Robert Harrington, Associate Executive Director, **American Mathematical Society**, examined the roles of scholarly societies¹³ as they related to membership, mission and governance, advocacy and outreach, succession planning, and strategy and scale. He said that membership is declining. What does it mean to join? Does being a member still matter? What is the relationship of the society and publishers and what are key challenges faced by society publishers?

Kent Anderson, CEO of **Redlink**, and **David Smith**, Head, Product Solutions, **The Institution of Engineering and Technology (The IET)**, concluded the session by examining life in a post-factual world, i.e., scientific publishing in a time of political assaults.¹⁴ Several issues are of concern: authors seeking anonymity for safety, immigration of scientists, defunding of meetings, detention of scientists and physicians so they are not able to travel to meetings, and the free flow of information.

Publishing has morphed into a suite of services, and the scholarly record is diversifying, so publishers must be attentive to a "wake-up call": misinformation from hackers, Sci-Hub as a security threat, and an attack on the information world.¹⁵ Some problems are caused by Silicon

Valley; everything is being done by algorithms. We may have thought this is benign but it is obviously not. Algorithms are built to create and drive markets, not create knowledge; which is causing science to suffer.

The **2018 SSP** meeting will be in Chicago on May 30-June 1 at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel. 🍷

Donald T. Hawkins is an information industry freelance writer based in Pennsylvania. In addition to blogging and writing about conferences for *Against the Grain*, he blogs the **Computers in Libraries and Internet Librarian** conferences for **Information Today, Inc. (ITI)** and maintains the **Conference Calendar on the ITI Website** (<http://www.infotoday.com/calendar.asp>). He is the Editor of **Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage**, (*Information Today*, 2013) and Co-Editor of **Public Knowledge: Access and Benefits** (*Information Today*, 2016). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the **University of California, Berkeley** and has worked in the online information industry for over 45 years.

Endnotes

1. <http://modelpublishingcontract.org>
2. See the full version of this article for details on each of these vendors' offerings.
3. Illustrations of the map appear in the full version of this article.
4. For example, see <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/04/whos-downloading-pirated-papers-everyone>.
5. "Mapping the Free E-book Supply Chain," available shortly at <http://www.publishing.umich.edu/projects/mapping-the-free-ebook/>.
6. <http://www.doabooks.org/>
7. <https://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>
8. <http://oamj.org/>
9. See the full version of this article for a list of Suber's questions.
10. "When is a Publisher Not a Publisher? Cobbling Together the Pieces to Build a Workflow Business," <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/02/09/cobbling-together-workflow-businesses/>.
11. "Library Expenditures, Salaries Outstrip Inflation," <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/03/29/library-expenditures-salaries-outstrip-inflation/>.
12. "Libraries May Have Gotten the Privacy Thing All Wrong," <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2016/06/23/libraries-may-have-gotten-the-privacy-thing-all-wrong/>.
13. "The Role of Scholarly Societies," <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2014/09/24/the-role-of-scholarly-societies/>.
14. "Scientific Publishing in a Time of Political Assaults," <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/01/31/scientific-publishing-time-political-assaults/>.
15. "Publishing in a Time of Information Warfare—A Wakeup Call," <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/04/03/publishing-in-a-time-of-information-warfare-a-wakeup-call/>.

an environment of rapid technological development. Read more about the **IFLA Global Vision** project, which is getting energetic input from thousands of librarians and friends worldwide; results will form the basis of **IFLA's** strategy after 2018. See: <https://globalvision.ifla.org/> and join in the discussion! The **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation** is supporting this work.

Next year, **IFLA's WLIC** will be held in Kuala Lumpur. It's always refreshing to see, as the meetings travel from one continent to another, the opportunities that are made for local professionals to travel at least to the **Congress** when it comes to their neighborhood. This year, Polish librarians had that precious opportunity, as two years

ago was the case for librarians from all over sub-Saharan Africa, when **IFLA** met in Cape Town.

The work of **IFLA** is valuable for many reasons, of course. But in the end, the greatest value is the inspiration that comes from experiencing the powerful presence of libraries from many different societies — societies with their own challenges — and the collegiality that this marvelous profession breeds across all the boundaries of language, culture, religion, ethnicity, and politics from every continent but one, in endlessly animated discussion with one another. It's the **Charleston Conference** or the **Fiesole Retreat** on steroids — and without **Katina!**

Takeaways? Really truly, all of us, in our many settings, are global ambassadors one way or another. And while we're at it, we have fun too — whether in Poland or Charleston. It's the best game in the world. 🍷