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Back Talk — Can we Build the Offline Internet

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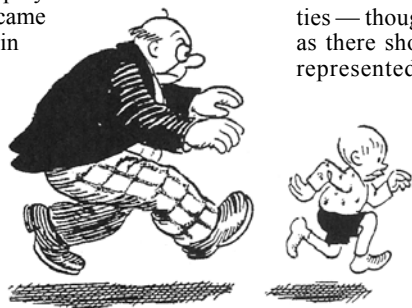
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How did we ever live without the Internet? I ask myself that when I look around at how much of what we do every day is either *on* the net or work or play or everyday householding that couldn't be the way it is without our networked lives.

But for all the three billion network users in the world (according to the **International Telecommunication Union**), for most of the people on the planet it's still a netless world. It shouldn't be.

The obvious way to increase net usage is to increase net accessibility: broadband everywhere, that sort of thing. But there are also a lot of people beyond the reach of the net. They live in remote and impoverished locations, or they suffer under post-conflict or post-disaster conditions, or perhaps they live in the Bronx and can't afford data plans on their phones. Can we act now to bring the benefits of networked information to such populations?

Many people and organizations are making exactly that effort, with entrepreneurship, creativity, and passionate commitment. Two of those organizations, in collaboration with **IFLA** (*http://www.ifla.org*), came together this winter to host a summit meeting for people working on such projects, with a plan to build a consortium that will leverage the energy and talent of all. In a way, the inspiration for the gathering — the realization that there were many unconnected players at work in this space — came in an **IFLA** presentation in Wrocław last summer by **Japri Masli** of the **Sarawak State Library**. His paper about the wonderful project "Pustaka in a Box" can be found in the **IFLA Library** — *http://library.ifla.org/* — and is worth reading.

Two other projects that inspired the event were:

- SolarSPELL (*http://solarspell.org/*), an **Arizona State University**-based project, led by **Professor Laura Hosman**, takes a solar-powered device to the ends of the earth. The device becomes a portable hotspot and delivers content from its own memory card to whoever is within reach with a minimal ability to make a Wi-Fi connection. **Hosman** has worked, for example, with Peace Corps volunteers on remote Pacific islands.

- Libraries Without Borders — Bibliothèques sans Frontières (*https://www.librarieswithoutborders.org/*) from France, founded in 2007 and led by Executive Director **Jérémy Lachal**, brings its *IdeasBox* to humanitarian crises — they began this work in Haiti in 2010.

With the support of **IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions)**, **ASU's Library**, led by **Jim O'Donnell** and his **AUL** colleague **Lorrie McAllister**, hosted the summit at the end of January, bringing together representatives of twenty organizations from as far away as Colombia, Switzerland, and Malaysia. There was expertise from the hardware, software, humanitarian, and library communities — though not as many librarians as there should be! Some projects represented were quite small and locally focused, but both **INASP** (*http://www.inasp.info/en/*) and **Research4Life** (*http://www.research4life.org/*) had keen observers on hand to offer encouragement and to think about how to make the connections between content providers, civil society organizations, and the wizards represented in the summit, in order to allow faster and more effective progress.

For two days a happy, energized room of 25 people or so had the pleasure of discovering like-minded new friends and colleagues. Everyone had the refreshing sense that they were not so alone in what they were doing and that, in their collaboration, more would be possible than they had imagined. Work on coordinating and collaborating efforts has begun already in the three weeks (as I write this) since the summit ended and more will follow — perhaps a next semi-summit at the **IFLA** meetings in Kuala Lumpur this summer.

The Summit agreed to the publication of *The Tempe Declaration* posted on its "Offline Internet" website (*http://www.offline-internet.org*). Fundamental to the sense of the meeting was the highest principle, as espoused by **IFLA** and all: that "access to the information commons should be recognized as a fundamental human right." Key further principles enunciated in the statement include:

- We share the belief that common development of standards and practices for software and content acquisition can help all interested parties to achieve their goals more easily and effectively.

- We judge that open source and open access tools and content best meet the interests of the communities we seek to support.

- We expect to work in the space of not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations, while welcoming conversations with, on the one hand, governmental entities and, on the other, commercial enterprises that can focus attention and resources on this work in ways compatible with our fundamental commitments.

The challenges are many and obvious, but the possibilities for the consortium are real. As a librarian, I am particularly interested in the work that will go into building modular repositories of content, targeted to different audiences and situations, on which many different kinds of users can draw in different situations. That will require a *lot* of work (and support for that work): work on standards, work on content selection, work on negotiating access to licensed content, work on creating and drawing together open access content, and work on the curation and operation of those repositories. But if that work gets done, it can offer tools for improving human development in many countries and

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situations, right at the margins of what is now possible, right where it is badly needed.

Join us! For more information: *internet.unplugged@gmail.com*

"What is a man, a woman, a child, once safe, food and shelter provided, if they cannot read, write, draw or communicate, and thus take back their place in the human community, to envision their future and start fresh?" — **Patrick Weil**, President of Libraries Without Borders. 🌳

Participants in the Tempe summit, February 1, 2018.

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Library Association, a representative to the **Council of Faculty and Academic Societies**, and principal investigator to an **NIH/NNLM Express Library Digitization Award** grant. She regularly consults for publishers and vendors. In her role as associate professor, she teaches scholarly communications within the medical education program at **WMed**. These new board members will begin their terms at the end of the **SSP 40th Annual Meeting** in Chicago, in June.

The **American Psychological Association (APA)** has announced a new partnership with the peer review platform **Publons**. **APA** will pilot **Publons' Reviewer Recognition Service** across 30 of their core journals. **Publons' Reviewer Recognition Service** integrates with all peer review submission systems, providing peer reviewers instant recognition for their contributions, in full compliance with journal review policies. During the pilot, experts who peer review for **APA's** participating journals can instantly add records of their reviews to **Publons** with the click of a button. This lets **APA** reviewers effortlessly maintain a verified record of their peer review contributions for promotion and funding applications. Academics interested in reviewing for participating **APA** journals will be able to connect with an editorial member through the click of a button on the journal's profile page. For more details on the partnership and to see a list of participating journals, visit: *https://publons.com/in/apa/*.

Whew! Glad that spring has sprung at long last! 🌳