
Brief communication: "Providing Access through Co-operation" – summary of a conference

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Abstract

Presents a summary of the latest in the series of international conferences on interlending and document supply. Whilst co-operation between researchers, publishers and librarians was the main theme of the Conference, other topics discussed included union catalogues, standards, digitisation and national systems.

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The 7th International Interlending and Document Supply Conference was held in Ljubljana, Slovenia from 1-5 October 2001 (see Plates 1-7).

In his keynote address, Graham Cornish (UK) set the tone for this excellent conference when he stated that "libraries and librarians are here to stay but not to stay the same". It was apparent from the variety of projects described over the length of the Conference that we are in a time of transition and that we are rising to the challenge. There are many ways to adapt to these changes, but they all come back to co-operation, the timely theme of the Conference.

Co-operation is sometimes called partnership, strategic alliance, or sharing but, whatever you call it, it is fundamental to everything we do. It was the focus of the final morning (Heidi Visser (South Africa), Dennis Massie (USA), Terry Weech (USA)), but was evident throughout the conference (Vida Močnik (Slovenia), Nadezhda Erokhina (Russia), Pentti Vattulainen (Finland), Richard Thurlow (UK)).

Papers from Australia (Tom Ruthven), Hungary (Éva Kürti), and India (Srirangapatam Srinivas) showed the continuing importance of traditional means of co-operation, particularly the union catalogue. While we are often told that standards such as Z39.50 will make the union catalogue obsolete, it is clear from these presentations that the union catalogue continues to be a vital and efficient means of finding and sharing information.

The need for an even closer relationship between libraries, publishers and suppliers was also apparent. The panel debate and discussion between publishers and librarians (Sally Morris (UK), Martin Žnideršič (Slovenia), Kjell Nilsson (Sweden), and Malcolm Smith (UK)), and the presentation from Janet Lees (UK), made it clear that each of these groups has similar concerns. Sometimes, we are approaching the issue from the flip side of one another, but it was evident that these concerns must be addressed collectively in order to find a solution that works for all parties.

The importance of technology and standards is not surprising to any of us, but Conference speakers put a relatively new focus on the user instead of on the technology itself. As Marian De Saxe (Australia) said: "Are end-users really interested in how we



Plate 1 The organizers (photo courtesy of National and University Library, Ljubljana)



Plate 2 An audience (photo courtesy of National and University Library, Ljubljana)

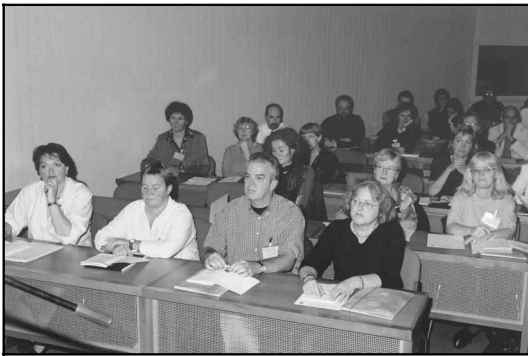


Plate 3 Registration (photo courtesy of National and University Library, Ljubljana)



deliver these resources provided that the material required is available and is easily accessible?"

Presentations from Louis Houle (Canada), Silvana Mangiaracina (Italy), Anne Morris (UK) and Robert Vehovec (Slovenia) all described methods in which the end-user was being brought closer to the actual item needed through the use of a variety of systems and services. But it is important to note that, as Gwen Bird (Canada) said in her discussion of the ILL protocol, "in the end, the protocol is only as good as its use." We need to co-operate among ourselves in order to ensure interoperability among these various systems.

Plate 4 A speaker (photo courtesy of National and University Library, Ljubljana)



Plate 5 An audience (photo courtesy of National and University Library, Ljubljana)



Plate 6 A visit to a musical (photo courtesy of National and University Library, Ljubljana)



A particularly interesting new development described during the conference was the use of digitisation as a complement to interlibrary loan. Günter Mühlberger (Austria), in his presentation on digital conversion as an alternative to shipping books, quoted Anne Kenney (2000) as saying that: "libraries and archives face a critical transition in which digital projects must give way to digital programs."

Chris Wright (USA) sees this transition happening in a similar project in his library through the increasing co-operation of the digitisation staff in making previously un-loanable materials available on the library's Web site.

Plate 7 The trip to Lake Bled and Postojna Caves (photo courtesy of National and University Library, Ljubljana)

There is no getting away from the issue of money! Two of the speakers (Lex Lefebvre (The Netherlands) and Terry Morrow (UK)) focused on payment and/or pricing as challenges faced by publishers and libraries alike. Sara Gould (UK), talking of a co-operative payment scheme, even described how IFLA vouchers had been used not just for their original purpose in ILL but also in other creative ways to support the sharing of resources.

On a quite different note, partnerships were seen as a means of ensuring the continued diversity or plurality of available resources. Malcolm Smith (UK) felt that a return to a decentralised system would help support access to diverse materials, while Carlotta Alpigiano (Italy) saw a role for ILL/DD services and national libraries in preserving a space free from "market censorship" through the delivery and preservation of lesser known materials.

In short, little is achieved without partnerships, strategic alliances or whatever term we care to use, in our shared goal of providing access through co-operation.

As well as the presented papers, the Conference featured the panel debate already mentioned, library visits, and several hands-on workshops, in which delegates were able to update their knowledge of OCLC, BLDSC services, Proquest and COBISS. But perhaps, as with many conferences, the greatest value was in the "strategic alliance" among the regular delegates during coffee breaks and the many excellent social events.

As the roles of different players change, so the debate will continue as to who does what for whom and when! This is not even the beginning of this debate but an important stage in its development. It will be interesting to see what the agenda is for the 8th Conference.