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Transforming our libraries, ourselves: ALA in Las Vegas – a brief outline with focus on international programs

Maitrayee Ghosh

American Library Association (ALA) International Relations Round Table (IRRT) organizes few programs every year for international community, including a reception of international librarians during ALA conference.

Goals and mission of IRRT:

- to promote interest in libraries/ librarianship worldwide and help to coordinate ALA's international activities;
- to collect information and provide support to librarians and library professionals worldwide interested in exchange programs/projects;
- to disseminate information about international exchange opportunities; and
- to contribute to development of intercultural perspectives in the library profession through supporting international exchanges.

The conference venue and international participants

The theme of ALA 2014 conference was "Transforming our libraries, ourselves". The venue was the Las Vegas convention center. The word "Vegas" means business, and Las Vegas is a popular conference site known for its dynamic multicultural lifestyle, delicious restaurants, theatrical shows, art galleries, gaming, nightlife, outdoor activities, shopping and other general attractions. It is a lively place to visit. Steve Sisolak, Chair, Clark County Commission in Las Vegas mentioned:

[. . .] theme this year is about transformation. It's fitting [. . .] in Las Vegas, for no community understands transformation quite like we do. From early days as a native American oasis, to

the wild west, to today's global tourism mecca, Las Vegas has seen and done it all (ALA, 2014).

International attendee

The conference attracted more than 500 international participants from approximately 80 countries (Table I).

International librarians' orientation

It was a "must-attend" session for first-time international attendees and other members from different parts of the world. ALA members provided an overview of ALA, the conference, exhibits and special introduction to the city of Las Vegas. This was an opportunity to meet other colleagues who help international librarians get the most from their conference experience.

International Librarians' Reception

IRRT organized and hosted the international visitors' reception at the ALA Annual Conference. This program offered a unique opportunity to network with hundreds of information professionals from around the world. The International Librarians' Reception was held at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Majorie Barrick Museum.

International papers and projects – IRRT paper session

The session theme "E-books and e-readers: Leveling the playing field or widening the digital Gap?" featured projects and research, illustrating how e-books and e-readers have impacted libraries and readers in many different ways all over the world. It featured various projects, trends and issues related to the use of e-books in libraries

in the developed and developing world. Following papers were accepted for presentation:

- Building Mobile Learning in Distance education in Nigeria.
- Addressing Canada's Digital Divide: E-books at Vancouver Public Library.
- E-books in the mobile age: advocacy and acceptance in India.
- Usage and Challenges of E-books and E-readers in South east Asia.

E-books in the mobile age: advocacy and acceptance in India

In her presentation, the author mentioned that currently e-books consumption in India is much slower than the UK or USA but the future of e-books is promising due to the fact that India is the world's third largest English speaking country with a huge English language book market. India's population is nearly 1.3 billion. It is predicted that e-book adoption in India will rise due to a high level of mobile density in rural India, especially smartphones, phablets and tablets, as the primary access channels.

India is known for its wide disparities, especially in language, the initiative to develop regional language e-reader is the latest trend that supports a large number of Indian languages. The mobile penetration in India is one of the highest in the world. Indian e-book market, which had finally started to really ignite in 2013, is growing not due to e-reader sales but because people are reading on their smartphones. The phablet is a combination of half-phone and half-tablet (smartphones with screen sizes between 5-inch and 6.99-inch), eliminating the need for two devices.

Table I.
International programs and events

International programs	Events
International librarians orientation	International poster session
IFLA update	International Librarians Reception
IRRT paper session	International pavilion in the exhibit hall
IRRT chair's program	Learning international recipes from the field International Visitors
International developments in library linked data	Center (IVC) – a place for relaxation and discussion
The many facets of volunteerism (International sustainable library development interest group)	

The phablets emerge as a popular e-reader in India, and its sale has been increasing impressively (Table II).

Infibeam is an e-commerce company in India launched Pi that looks like the Amazon Kindle, with a six inch e-Ink screen and capability to read word documents and collaborating with the National Council of Educational Research and Training to make textbooks in digital format supporting13 Indian Languages.

Barriers to e-book growth in India

Although Indian readers are aware of the advantages of e-books, they continue to prefer and use printed publications due to following reasons:

- lack of electronic content in Indian languages; and
- lack of proliferation of information and communications technology tools in rural areas which constitute a major percentage of the Indian population – although technological

advancements in e-books arena (for example, availability of regional language e-reader) are available, it is not as much when compared to large population.

Session on disaster preparedness and digital badge designing

On 29th June, Dive into Digital Badges! A badge curriculum – a workshop was conducted by Emily Ford, Annie Pho and Nicole Pagowsky. They mentioned digital badges are growing in popularity and adoption. They share their experiences using badges for information literacy instruction. In this hands-on workshop, panelists directed the participants through designing a customizable plan for implementing badges at their own institutions, considering factors such as learning outcomes, student motivation and flexibility for embedding in the campus environment.

On 30th June, Disaster preparedness in the 21st century:

preserving library collections and services by Catherine Tyler stated that in an age of drastic weather events and increasing dependence on digital collections and Internet connections for practically all library functions, librarians need to give some thought on how to function in the event of long-term (more than a few days) power outages. This session evaluated the possibility of disaster and examined access ability of alternate power sources, making sure that digital collections are backed up locally when possible (instead of or in addition to "in the cloud") and preserving a core physical collection. She told the audience that Foreign Exchange Management Act is a giant in disaster preparedness in USA.

She emphasized climate change, issues and concern in collection development and preservation policies for twenty-first century libraries. Today, the major concern is to protect the library collection that will be centered on:

Table II.
E-book readers for Indian languages

Name of the product	Descriptions	Price
AKASH (low-cost tablet by DATAWIND)	7-inch capacitive touch screen, Android 4.0.3 ICS OS, 1 GHz Cortex A8 processor. High-quality video streaming and HD quality video playback	US $ 90 US $ 20 (student version)
E-pustak (e-book reader-local made)	Developed under E-prashala project. 7-inch LED screen; educational content of 1st to 10th standard, supports English, and Marathi; 3 hours battery backup	
Wink (EC media international)	Linux-based operating system, supports 15 languages. The Wink store offers a large number of e-books	US $ 150
Wishtel IRA tablets for Indian languages	Google Android 2.2, includes eBook reader app for Hindi and other languages, as well as course content for ICSE, CBSE and state boards	US $ 90
Infibeam Pi e-book reader	The device has an e-book store, a website for customers to purchase digital content and a digital platform	US $ 130

- climate change – high CO_2 in the air;
- major portion of data is stored in cloud; and
- cyber crime.

It was further stated that an appropriately designed disaster insurance program is vital for stemming the tide of increasing losses from natural disasters, for example, acidified paper that crumbles to dust, leather, parchment, film and magnetic tape attacked by light, heat, humidity or dust need a special attention and preservation. Along with natural causes, man-made accidents regularly afflict libraries and archives. Also, there will be floods, fires, hurricanes and earthquakes. She elaborated on the hazard mitigation plan and identified following technical disasters regularly occur in libraries: power cuts, break down of computer networks, gas leaks, communication failures and cooling/heating/ventilation system problems.

The presenter discussed and recommended following online resources for creating a disaster plan:

- WWW.dplan.org
- www.ala.org/tools/disaster-planning

- www.sla.org/learn/resource-guides-2/disaster-planning-and-recovery
- http://cool.conservation-us.org/cool/disaster
- www.techsoup.org/disaster-planning-and-recovery
- www.redcross.org/prepare/mobile-apps

Special services@ ALA 2014

Throughout the event, attendees were provided with wide range of networking opportunities:

International Visitors Center (IVC): This place was meant for international attendees to relax, review the conference program or hold small meetings with new-found colleagues and friends. A computer with Internet access was provided, and ALA volunteers answered questions and helped participants.

Networking: A big space was dedicated for delegates/multiple groups to gather at once for discussion or have a quick meeting, rehearse or follow up on a presentation or just to recharge/refresh. The area featured free Wi-Fi, chair and tables, power cords and a projector and screen as well as some gadgets.

Unconference@ ALA 2014: An unconference is a participant-guided experience that harnesses the unstructured conversations participants usually have between sessions into the conference. Unlike most conferences where talking heads and group leaders decide what is important, unconferences are organized by the crowd and are about knowledge sharing, passion and learning.

Poster sessions: See the list of poster sessions for the many international poster sessions at: http://ala14.ala.org/poster-sessions

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