

GIVE ME ACCESS OR GIVE ME DEATH

IFLA 2011 Congress Report

Courtesy of the an ALIA Excellence Award, Hayley Morton attended the IFLA Congress in Puerto Rico in August, donning her first-timer's green ribbon to navigate her way through a choice of 219 sessions, 22 library tours and more.

The opening keynote speaker, Dr Fernando Pico, set the theme for much of the conference for me as he spoke about the history of censorship and the journey of forbidden books through time and across cultures. Dr Pico reminded us that librarians need not, and should not, be complicit in matters of restriction to access of the written word. It is our calling to be advocates of free and open access to information.

IFLA Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) Chair, Paul Sturges discussed recent reports from Reportier Sans Frontiers (en.rsf.org/) which indicate internet censorship by many governments is on the rise. (FAIFE's book of choice on freedom of access to information in the digital age is *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* by Yevgeni Morozov.)

Whether the new eBook economy can guarantee freedom of access was discussed by a panel of authors, e-content developers and publishers. Ebooks are creating licensing and privacy issues for both publishers and libraries. One publisher's announcement of their intention to limit eBook lending in libraries to a licence of 26 issues per book and another publisher's demand for patron information to ensure loans were only made inside the library's service area are indicative of the minefield of unanswered questions the industry and our profession are facing.

Copyright in the digital age was also a topic of note. How do creators get their deserved rewards under the new models whilst ensuring access to the community at large? Will publishers develop new models to circumvent libraries altogether? Alternatively, will publishers disappear as mediators between authors and purchasers as user-friendly creation tools make it much more feasible for authors to do it alone or will libraries collaborate directly with authors to publish?

Could libraries collaborate with authors to publish e-formats? The panel consensus was that traditional publishers will still remain useful intermediaries between creators and buyers, by enabling platforms which can supply cheaper, better and faster than individual creators, but they must find new and better models for doing so. Libraries need to be more aggressive in negotiating deals which safeguard public

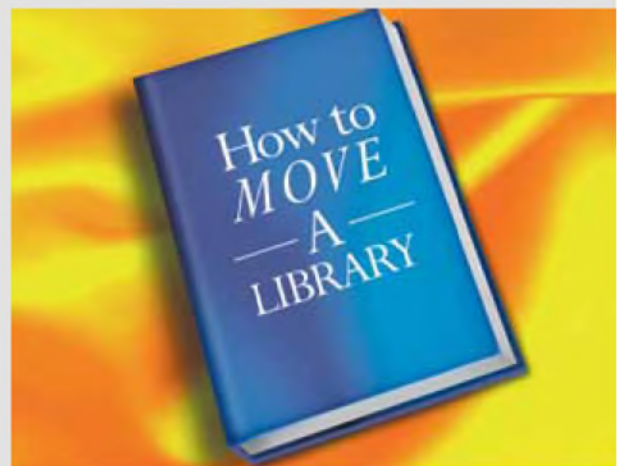
access. And library professionals urgently need to gain a better understanding of the issues currently faced by publishers, in order to be able to create meaningful dialogue and negotiations.

There were many good projects presented at IFLA 2011, which I do not have space to discuss here. But I must say that I was very proud to note that the work we do in Australia is as good, and in some cases better, than our international peers. In fact OCLC CEO, Jay Jordan, in his address on cloud computing in libraries and discovery layers, singled out our very own TROVE as a shining example. There were a few Australian presenters at IFLA this year but I believe there are many more projects and services underway across public, academic, special and school libraries which deserve to be showcased to the world. So get cracking on your IFLA 2012 abstracts now!

Hayley Morton

Library Services Coordinator, SA Water
hayley.morton@sawater.com.au

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