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October 22, 2010

2010 ALA International Relations Round Table International Librarians' Preconference

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International Relations Round Table is the only membership organization within the American Library Association (ALA) that focuses exclusively on international activities and interests. The International Relations Round Table (IRRT) Pre-Conference, designed specifically for international librarians at the ALA Annual Conference concentrates on the current state of librarianship in the United States, advocacy, literacy, information technologies and other issues impacting libraries and librarians globally. With a theme of "Web 2.0 and Mobile Technology – Building Global Connections," this year's program invited five panelists to talk about how their organization is applying Web 2.0, social networking tools and mobile technology in enhancing services, exposing resources, expanding outreach, and enriching the life of diverse customers in today's digital environment. June 25 brought together more than 70 library professionals from around the world to participate in a thought-provocative presentation and panel discussion at ALA's IRRT Annual Preconference in Washington, DC.

This year's conference began with a report from **Dr. Milena Dobрева**, Senior Researcher at the Centre for Digital Library Research, University of Strathclyde, concerning her research into the behavioral practices of patrons using Europeana (<http://europeana.eu>), a single access point to a wealth of European Cultural Heritage. With its rich multilingual content comprising more than 9 million digital objects contributed from over 1,000 cultural institutions across Europe, Europeana endeavors to align its content with user needs by applying social networking tools and features. Findings from six focus group studies composed of 89 participants revealed that users are dissatisfied with the lack of adequate digitized and contemporary European content, as well as the quality of metadata records, classification schema, and the relevancy ranking and precision of search results. Subjects offered several recommendations on enhancing the functionality of the site's interface, including customization, social tagging, rating, and collaborative storytelling, as well as the capability to add and share patrons' own content with the community. Dr. Dobрева concluded that her library's website should move from mere information delivery to active patron involvement, community building, experience sharing and concomitant scholarly and cross-cultural enrichment.

Next, in her presentation on developing a library website for mobile devices, **Carrie Gits**, Assistant Director of Reference, Alvin Sherman Library, Research & Information Technology Center, Nova Southeastern University, pointed out that a huge number of our students today carry a mobile device with web accessibility all the time. With exponential growth of our mobile population, she encouraged institutions to develop its mobile learning strategies. She then discussed the four design constraints of developing a mobile website: Screen size, computational power, input interfaces and bandwidth. Carrie shared experiences from her own library in developing a simple, mobile-friendly website which provides hours of operation, maps and directions, contact information, current events, a library catalog search utility, items up for renewal, and a feedback channel. Finally, she demonstrated statistics from a one-year

mobile website usage, and discussed her library's upcoming mobile-based challenges as well as future plans.

Brandon Badger, Product Manager of Google Books, revealed Google Book's new adventure – *Google Editions* (GE, <http://books.google.com/>). In what's known as the cloud computing environment, hardware becomes software; software migrates into the cloud, and your "personal library" becomes easily accessible via your web browser. Unlike other eBook vendors' business model which requires patrons to access library materials from proprietary devices and through license-based applications, including Amazon's Kindle, Apple's iBooks, Sony's e-Reader and Barnes and Noble's Nook, *Google Editions* is platform and file format independent. All content is stored in Google's "cloud bookstore," and delivered simply via a web browser. In other words, GE offers the freedom of accessing eBooks from any web-enabled device, including mobile phones, from anywhere. Another significant advantage of GE is its searchability which empowers users to look up key words in its vast collection of digitized titles, and view abstracts of pages in context with the highlighted search term(s). Mr. Badger further indicated that *Google Books* is now integrated with regular *Google Search*. Patrons start a regular Google Search, then select their books based on results facilitated through Google Books. There are three sources for GE: Digital feeds from publishers, physical books from publishers, and books from libraries themselves. Brandon further explained the digitization process and some of its challenges, including OCR quality, complex layouts, reCAPTCHA, handling of foreign languages, and differences in metadata.

Fishing Where the Fish Are, **Christopher Carlson**, Supervisor of the Web Services Division at the Library of Congress (LC), shared strategies in incorporating Web 2.0 and mobile technology at LC. To place the new technologies in context, he first recounted two missions of LC: First, to make its resources available to the Congress and the American people; and second, to sustain and preserve LC's collection for future generations. Guided by this dual premise, three principles are followed to direct the development of LC's website: 1. Finding; 2. Portability and Sharing; and 3. Understanding. To expose its contents, LC employs Web 2.0 tools and channels content to a much larger audience. For example, LC's Flickr account (http://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/) contains more than 9,000+ images from its vast photographic archive. LC further partnered with Flickr to create the *Flickr Commons* program (<http://www.flickr.com/commons>), whose goal is "to increase access to publicly-held photography collections, and to provide a means for the general public to contribute their own information and knowledge." Consequently, collective wisdom has contributed 27,000+ comments, 122,000+ user tags, and 30,000 contacts. There are now more than 40 cultural institutions contributing their content to this project, spanning the United States, Australia, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands,. In 2009, LC further expanded its Web 2.0 offering by launching sites vis-à-vis: YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/LibraryOfCongress>), iTunes U (<http://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Browse/loc.gov>), FaceBook (<http://www.facebook.com/libraryofcongress>), and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/librarycongress>). Lastly, Mr. Carlson discussed LC's mobile strategy. Based on LC's website statistics for the first six months of 2010, more than 73% of usage is from devices manufactured by Apple (iPhone, iPod, iPad). Instead of developing a mobile website for

every platform of mobile device, LC decided to focus on building an application for Apple mobile devices exclusively. Mr. Carlson showed images of the prototype using photos and videos¹, highlighting exhibitions, collections and architectural features. As for the future, LC will continue to develop robust mobile applications for multiple platforms to search and display LC's collections, along with developing lightweight clients in the "computing environment cloud."

Tao Yang, East Asian Librarian, Rutgers University Libraries, described how he developed a subject specific website *FOREAST* (Free Open Resources for East Asian Studies; <http://www.foreast.org/>) that collects relevant scholarly resources published on the Internet by individual scholars, academic institutions, and cultural repositories. Built upon the free blog site, *WordPress.com*, FOREAST now offers 300 free resources from 20+ library and scholarly sites from around the globe. To market the site, Mr. Yang further extensively employs social networking tools, including FaceBook, Twitter, deli.ci.ous and LibGuides . Furthermore, Mr. Yang makes use of WordPress Statistics, Google Analytics, and Google Webmaster Tools to collect usage statistics and to analyze the "usage patter." Other Web 2.0 features incorporated into FOREAST include tagging, tag cloud, rating, user feedback, and Google Docs. According to Mr. Yang, site usage has seen steadily burgeoning since its inception, April 2009, and FOREAST is linked from many other scholarly sites. By relying upon free Web tools, content and services, FOREAST demonstrates radical pricing strategies in the virtual environment of *cloud computing*.

Conclusions

The IRRT Pre-conference provides precious opportunities for librarians around the world to explore critical and contemporary issues in serving our patrons, advocating library services, and sharing our experiences. It further offers a peer-sponsored platform encouraging intensive dialogue and offering exercises in the expression of diversity and mutual understanding for global librarianship.

This year's conference provided invaluable insights into the innovative services of applying social networking tools and mobile technologies for connecting e-content and e-services with a disparate and unique patronage. The follow-up evaluation and discussion clearly indicates that participants valued best practices and real-life case studies (exhibiting new technologies applied to library services) most of all. Foreign participants were especially interested in the behemoth-scale Google Books digitization project, and were eager to become deeply involved in the program, in order to render their unique, and uniquely educational, cultural, *local* content available to patrons *planet-wide*.

Conference presentations are available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/irrtprec>

¹ Library of Congress released its iPhone/iPad application on August 3rd, 2010 (see <http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2010/08/shiny-appy-people-library-gets-iphone-app/> for details and downloading.)