Aberystwyth University

World Library Summit and visits to libraries in Singapore: a report
Tedd, Lucy A.

World Library Summit and visits to libraries in Singapore: a report

Lucy A. Tedd is a Lecturer in the Department of Information and Library Studies, University of Wales Aberystwyth, UK. E-mail: lat@aber.ac.uk

Abstract

The World Library Summit on Global Knowledge Renaissance was a conference organised by the National Library Board of Singapore in April 2002. An overview of the papers presented and which covered the broad themes of knowledge augmentation, cultural entrepreneurship and knowledge governance is given. In addition descriptions of visits made to libraries in Singapore following the conference are provided.

Keywords: Conference, Report, Singapore, Libraries, Globalisation, Knowledge Management

Word Count:

1. Introduction

In April 2002 an ambitious conference, the World Library Summit, was organised by the National Library Board (NLB) of Singapore in conjunction with the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts of Singapore. In the Foreword to the conference programme the Chairman of the NLB (Dr.Tan Chin Nam) noted that :

"The World Library Summit is a pacesetting effort in addressing the key issues affecting the evolution of knowledge societies in a globalised world. The post 9-11 world calls for a greater connectivity, convergence and collaboration among nations and across different cultures, creating, sharing and deploying knowledge to benefit societies and humanity have become more pressing. How will new management be able to make a difference to this world will be a great challenge for all of us.

Info-communication technology has radically changed the means of publishing and delivering information to the public. New issues and interests in copyright and publishing rights are coming to the fore. The ancient roles of authors, publishers and deliverers will be turned into new models of creating knowledge. Public access to information is critical in developing the knowledge society. Libraries the world over face enormous challenges this millennium. How to remain relevant in a rapidly transforming knowledge infrastructure rests in the skills of today's librarian –the traditional bastion of knowledge societies."

The structure of the summit, which had as its theme, Global Knowledge Renaissance, comprised three main areas:

Knowledge augmentation- the process of connecting and converging knowledge domains to evolve a knowledge society across cultures and civilisations;

Culture entrepreneurship- the process of creating economic value through connecting people to people and people to knowledge;

Knowledge governance – the process of governing different knowledge domains alongside different knowledge infrastructures across geographical boundaries.

The task of implementing the vision for the conference by organising relevant speakers, attendees, venue and so on was ably carried out by a committee chaired by the Director of the NLB (Mr. Ramachandran). In his welcome message Mr. Ramachandran noted that we all need to "continuously share, learn and acquire new

knowledge and convert this learning to benefit not only ourselves and our organisations but to the advancement of global knowledge and mankind."

The conference 'proper' took place over three days with one day each being devoted to the three areas specified above. Prior to the conference there were various seminars. The first, entitled New Millennium, covered two separate topics on two different days – one was Information Security and the other Map and Design Libraries. In addition there was 2-day seminar, held in conjunction with Dialog, for colleagues from ASEAN (the Association of South East Asian Nations) libraries looking at the changing role of academic libraries. Delegates from all the ASEAN countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Republic of Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) attended.

An exhibition was held in conjunction with the conference with some 14 exhibitors including international organisations such as: Ebsco, Epixtech, Proquest, Softlink, Thomson Learning as well Singapore-based organisations such as Digital Publishing Solutions, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the National Library Board. Following the conference visits to various libraries in Singapore were available for delegates.

The conference was held in Singapore's impressive Suntec City – a 100,000 sq.m. series of meeting rooms on six floors. The area allocated to the conference was well able to accommodate the 1000+ delegates from 20 or so countries. All the papers were presented in English.

Support for the conference was provided by a number of organisations including: the British Council, Compaq, the Goethe Institut, the Hong Kong Library Association, the Indian Library and Information Science Association, Sun Microsystems, Thomson Learning International and several Singapore-based companies and organisations.

Singapore was an appropriate location for a world library summit such as this. Sabaratnam(1997) describes the setting up, in 1992, of a Library Review Committee charged with drawing up a master plan for the transformation of libraries in Singapore to meet the needs of the information society. Chia (2001) reports on this transformation and describes how methodologies such as business process reengineering and project management were used.

2. Overview of conference papers

2.1 Day 1. Knowledge augmentation

Following welcome addresses from the Chairman of the NLB and the Acting Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts there were two keynote addresses.

The first was by Dr. Douglas Engelbart, currently Director of the Bootstrap Institute and Bootstrap Alliance (www.bootstrap.org) in the US. Engelbart has been an innovative figure in the development of computer systems over the last 50 years. In 1967 Dr. Engelbart, was working at the ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency)-funded Augmentation Research Center (ARC) in California. ARPA was keen for collaboration between its then 13 funded computer research laboratories and organised for them to be networked to promote the sharing of resources. ARC therefore became the second host computer on ARPANET (the forerunner of the Internet). Following work on ways of sharing resources Engelbart organised a

demonstration of some of his ideas in 1968. The mouse, hypermedia, and on-screen video teleconferencing were some of the 'inventions' of ARC that were first shown at that demonstration. Engelbart's conference paper, entitled, *Improving our ability to improve,* explored ways of implementing an "improvement infrastructure" that could result in sustained and radical innovation.

The second keynote presentation was by another very important figure in the history of computing: Dr Charles Goldfarb. In 1969 Goldfarb, whilst working at IBM, developed (with others) the first structured markup language. In 1974 he invented the Standardised General Markup Language(SGML) and went on to work on markup languages for hypertext, graphics and multimedia and, most recently, XML. XML (eXtensible Markup Language)is a web-based subset of SGML used in many current applications. Further details on his work can be found at: www.sgmlsource.com/press/index.htm. Goldfarb's presentation, *Markup languages and knowledge retention*, outlined how, thanks to markup languages such as XML, we now have the means to capture, store and interconnect abstract ideas.

Presentations in this section were also given by:

Lynne Brindley, Chief Executive of The British Library (www.bl.uk) who spoke on the role of libraries in the knowledge society. Some of the roles she outlined included: knowledge preservation, digital meeting places, and support for information literacy.

Dr.Reagan Moore of the San Diego Supercomputer Centre (www.sdsc.edu) who spoke of the infrastructure being developed for data, information and knowledge management in the implementation of digital libraries.

Robert Cullen, President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Division of Thomson Learning (www.thomsonlearning.com) who spoke on the state of the world's libraries in the electronic world and in particular the role of publishers.

Dr. Dagmar Schmidmaier, State Librarian and Chief Executive Officer of the State Library of New South Wales (www.sl.nsw.gov.au) whose paper, *Building a knowledge agenda through vision, influence and passion*, described a number of initiatives that had been implemented within her library (e.g. the creation of the James Fairfax Matthew Flinders Electronic Archive (see www.sl.nsw.gov.au/flinders)) and which exemplified her belief that " developing knowledge in an organisation is a leadership agenda".

Renate Gompel, Head of the Office for Library Standards at Die Deutsche Bibliothek (DDB) in Germany (www.ddb.de), who spoke about the development of an information and knowledge society in Germany and how the DDB supports this and realises that it can no longer work just within a national context but needs to take note of international developments.

Prof. Ron Summers of the Department of Information Science at Loughborough University in the UK who spoke about the roles of classification, thesauri and metadata in the development of knowledge architectures.

2.2 Day 2 People connectivity and cultural entrepreneurship

The keynote address for this area was provided by Benson Puah, the Chief Executive Officer of The Esplanade (www.esplanade.com.sg). The Esplanade is a waterfront development in Singapore which will provide for a number of facilities including a performing arts complex as well as a library and information centre and which is due to open in October 2002.

There were several other presentations during the morning plenary session by noted Singaporeans:

Lim Siam Kim –the Chief Executive Officer of the National Heritage Board. As in other countries, 'memory institutions' (i.e. archives, libraries and museums) in Singapore are working together and the advantages of convergence were outlined.

Dr. Christopher Chia, Chief Executive of the NLB. The NLB was established in 1995, following the work of the Library Review Committee, with an aim to " spearhead the transformation of library services in Singapore in the Information Age" and a mission to " expand the learning capacity of the nation so as to enhance national competitiveness and to promote a gracious society." The NLB is responsible for a number of libraries in Singapore (as described later) and two in three Singaporeans are members of the library. Dr.Chia's paper outlined ways in which governments and libraries could collaborate especially in the area of e-government.

Other speakers in this session included Mark Garlinghouse, Director of Asian Sales for ISI Thomson Scientific and Dr. Dinesh Gupta, Associate Professor at the Kota Open University in India. Dr.Gupta's talk focused on the convergence of education and libraries given current technological developments and how this impacts on the "need for access and equity, cost-effectiveness and efficient systems of delivery of information and services."

The afternoon's parallel sessions comprised ten presentation covering two broad areas:

- social and intellectual agendas
- the learning agenda

Copyright issues were covered in two papers. Ann Shumelda Okerson, Associate University Librarian at Yale University provided a good overview of copyright law and the licensing of electronic information sources whilst the key legal issues for librarians in ASEAN countries were outlined by Andy Leck, a Principal with the Intellectual Property Practice and Litigation Practice of Baker and Mackenzie.Wong and Leow and Ken Chia who is a Principal in Information Technology and Telecommunications with the same firm(Leck and Chia, 2002).

2.3. Day 3. Knowledge governance and collaboration

The keynote speaker on the final day was Rinalia Abdul Rahim, Executive Director of the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) Secretariat in Malaysia (www.globalknowledge.org). Rahim spoke about the role of knowledge sharing (as opposed to knowledge management) and how it is at the core of GKP's vision and activities. One element of this mission is "to share information, experiences and resources to realise the potential of ICT to improve lives, reduce poverty and empower people".

The plenary sessions covered:

a) The organisational perspective with a variety of papers from Singapore, the USA and Australia discussing issues such as tools for knowledge discovery and creation, corporate intelligence, content management and personalisation and integrating heterogenoeus sources. On this last topic the author, Cameron Esslemont of Global

Library Services Network referred to discussions at the European Library Automation Group meeting in 2001 (Goossens,2002)

b) Evolving content exchange and retrieval standards with papers from Finland (on the Dublin Core), Korea (on Digital Object Identifiers) and Israel (on context sensitive reference linking)

The final parallel sessions covered various regional and national projects with interesting papers on:

- the hybrid library at Glasgow University (merlin.lib.gla.ac.uk)

- PERDANA-the national digital library system in Malaysia (www.pnm.my)

-the Intercity Digital Library Initiative in Shanghai (www.libnet.sh.cn)

- the Nordic Digital Library being developed in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden (www.lib.helsinki.fi)

-the International Islamic Digital Library which provides digital access to a range of Islamic material and is being developed by the MultiMedia Development Corporation of Malaysia (www.msc.com.my)

- a system for enhanced access for art communities in South East Asia (www.artpostasia.com)

3. Visits to Singaporean Libraries

During the week of the summit the Singapore Library Festival was held with many libraries opening their doors to people who would not normally be users. Conference delegates had the opportunity to participate in one of two Library Trails. The following reports aim to give a "flavour" of the libraries that delegates could visit.

3.1. National Library

The National Library of Singapore has evolved from a private subscription library which was established in a school called the Singapore Institution in 1823 soon after Singapore was founded by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. In 1958, the Library ceased to be a subscription library and established itself as both a national and public library. Since the formation of the NLB in 1995 the Library's core function has been to provide reference and information services to the general public, researchers, professionals and other information seekers. This is now achieved via a multi-tier system: the main National Reference Library, two regional libraries (at Tampines and Woodlands), 18 community libraries, 46 community children's libraries as well as libraries belonging to government agencies, schools, and private institutions.

The NLB implemented the Information Management and Delivery System (IMDS) from the CARL Corporation in the US in the late 1990s. Particular features of this implementation include:

- The self-service circulation stations which make use of ST Logitrack Self-Check and RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) systems that employ a chip embedded in the library material.

- CARL's multilingual Phone Circulation system which allows users to place holds and renew items via the telephone.

- Borrower Enquiry workstations which allow users to consult their records and pay fines and fees using cash card technology.

RFID technology is used by a number of libraries in Singapore and its use at the National University of Singapore is described in a News item in *Program* (2000)

A new service that was launched by the NLB in April 2002 was the eLibraryHub (www.elibraryhub.com) which is described as being "a one-stop integrated digital library' that offers users - individuals, businesses and community groups - a 'personalised' experience of having a library of their own. Users can search, organise and stock up resources according to their preference for navigation, look and feel, and interests. Relevant information is identified and presented to the users when they access the library. The information helps users in their knowledge acquisition, whether it is for self-improvement, business decision or edutainment, thereby enabling them to thrive in the global Information Age." Figure 1 shows a screenshot of part of the range of electronic resources available via the InfoMall, a onestop information kiosk which is part of the elibraryHub.

Take in Figure 1

The National Library has been in its present building since 1960 and a new building is planned for 2004.

3.2 library@orchard

Some years ago staff at NLB, following user surveys undertaken, found that Singaporeans aged between 18-35 were not making much use of public libraries. The result was the opening, in 1999, of a new community library on the fifth floor of a popular shopping mall in Singapore's famous Orchard Road.

As stated on the website of the Asian Building and Construction Network (www.abcnet.com.sg/abc/library1.html) the library has "an interior design that departs totally from the typical look or image associated with a library". This is achieved by having polished aluminium and glass furniture, parquet flooring, soft lighting and background music. The collection of 100,000 books, magazines, videos etc. is aimed to appeal to the lifestyle of young Singaporeans and covers material on travel, health and fitness and the arts. There were ten multimedia workstations in the library providing access to the Web, videos, electronic databases, and to Singapore One- a nationwide broadband network. The use of Singapore One in the provision of multimedia services to libraries in Singapore is described further by Hee (2000). In addition at library@orchard there are six music booths where users can sit and read and listen to music via headphones. I was most impressed with the total lack of an issue counter – all loans and returns are achieved via the use of the self-service workstations. The library is open for12 hours each day (10.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.). A further feature of this library was a 'Programme Zone' - where regular meetings (e.g for the Imperial College London Alumni Association of Singapore, a music group, a health group) were held. During our visit on a Saturday morning this library was buzzing with activity.

3.3. Ayer Rajah Children's Community Library

The final tier of the NLB's library structure is the children's community library. The Prime Minister,Mr Goh Chok Tong, raised concern in the early 1990s about the need to inculcate good reading habits in early childhood. The result has been the community children's libraries which are typically situated in the ground floor 'void' areas of Singapore's many tower blocks of housing. These libraries are aimed at children up to the age of 10. Each library is designed around a different theme (e.g. fairy tales, dinosaurs, marine life). The library we visited had a good collection of English language children's books, CD-ROMs, cassettes as well as some Chinese and Tamil materials. The libraries are usually open in the late afternoon/early evening at a time convenient for their young users.

3.4. Institute of South East Asian Studies (ISEAS) Library

ISEAS was set up in 1968 to provide an autonomous research centre for scholars concerned with South East Asia (www.iseas.edu.sg). The catalogue of the library is available on the Web for registered users and is known as SEALion (South East Asia Library Online). This is based on Epixtech's Horizon library management system. The library has a collection of almost 500,000 items in a variety of languages and formats. Horizon has also been used since 1995 in the development of a database of periodical articles published by ISEAS- this is known as SEAbase. InMagic database software is used for the construction of a database on biographies (SEAbiog) and private papers (SEAPriv) at ISEAS. Figure 2 shows a screenshot of the ISEAS home page.

Take in Figure 2

3.5 Ngee Ann Polytechnic Library

Ngee Ann Polytechnic offers business-related and technology-based diploma and advanced diploma programmes to its many students. It has evolved over the years from its beginnings as a technical college in the1960s. The campus libraries comprise a Lifestyle library (offering contemporary books, journals, videos, music etc.), an Academic library and a Quality Resource Centre (see www.np.edu.sg/library). Users can access electronic resources and other electronic university facilities from within the library via a wireless local area network. Students are encouraged to have their own laptop computers and these can be used, with the necessary transmitter/receiver, anywhere within the library building. The 3M RFID technology is used for the self issue, return and sorting system (which automatically allocates returned books to an appropriate 'box' for re-shelving). A range of e-resources is made available to students via the polytechnic library's home page. These include: the Exam Papers Database, Subject Guides to Internet Resources, E-Journals. The system used for library management is based on URICA. Figure3 shows part of the home page for the Library at Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Take in Figure 3

4.Conclusions

As can be evidenced by the details given above about the speakers…they were from a range of organisations, a range of countries and some very high-powered people gave the time and energies to present papers at this conference. This inevitably made for a stimulating few days. Details of all the speakers with abstracts of their papers are available on the conference Web site at www.wls.com.sg.

The range of developments within libraries in Singapore is also incredibly impressive. Singapore is a small country-roughly the size of the island of Anglesey off the North Wales coast-with a population of four million. Those working in Singaporean libraries have embraced a range of new technologies and methodologies in order to provide improved and innovative services for their users.

Peter Scott, a consultant from New Zealand, provided excellent summaries at the start of the second and third days of the conference and at the end of the conference and concluded his overview summary with the following: "There was a very strong sense throughout the Summit that we are all standing at a pivotal point in the development of society and that libraries are right there on the threshold of this future. To cross this threshold requires a clear sense of purpose and outcomes and the courage to take risks in a world of uncertainty. The Summit has given us a flying start in this direction."

References

Chia, C. (2001), Transformation of libraries in Singapore. *Library Review*, Vol. 50, Nos 7-8, pp343-8.

Goossens, P.(2002) "ELAG 2001: report of a library systems seminar on integrating heteregenous resources." *Program*, Vol.36, No.4, pp

Hee,Y.K. (2000),Multimedia library services on Singapore One network. *Herald of Library Science*, Vol.39, Nos3-4, pp224-231

Leck, A. and Chia, K. (2002) "*Guide to regional intellectual property laws for librarians*.". Singapore: National Library Board, 2002

News item (2000) National University of Singapore to use radio frequency identification technology. *Program*, Vol.34, No.4, pp421-422.
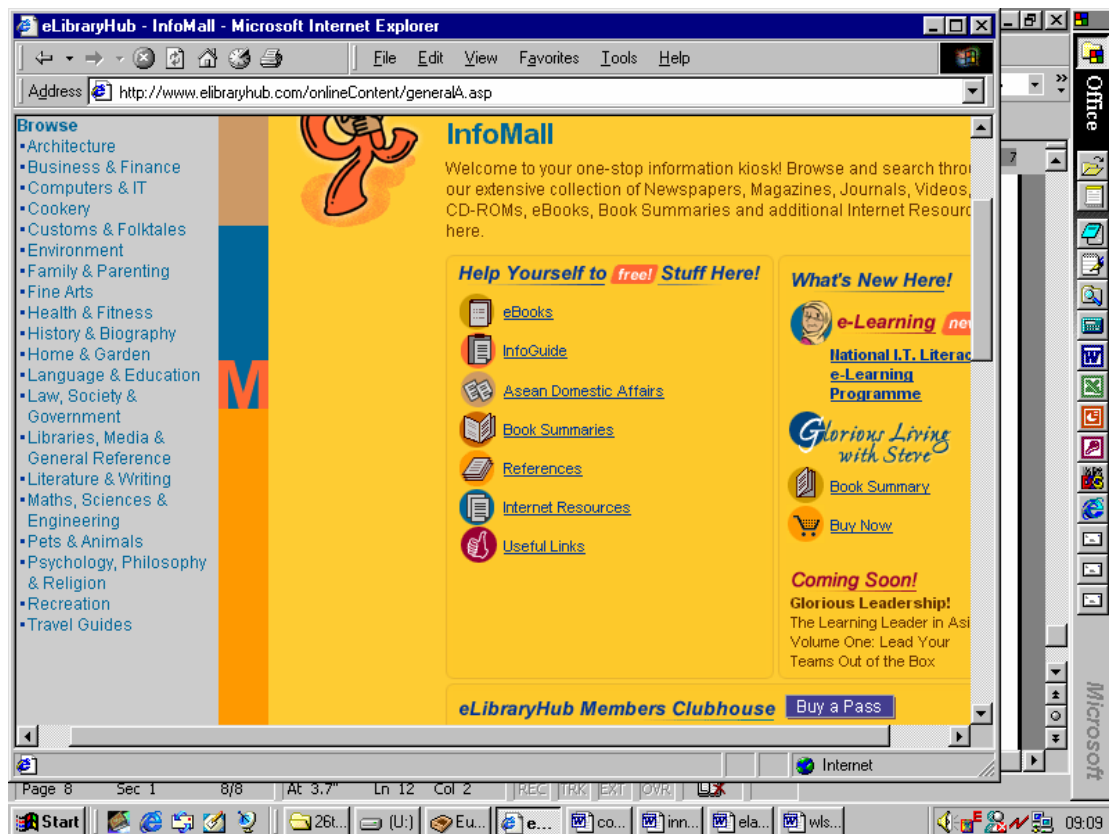
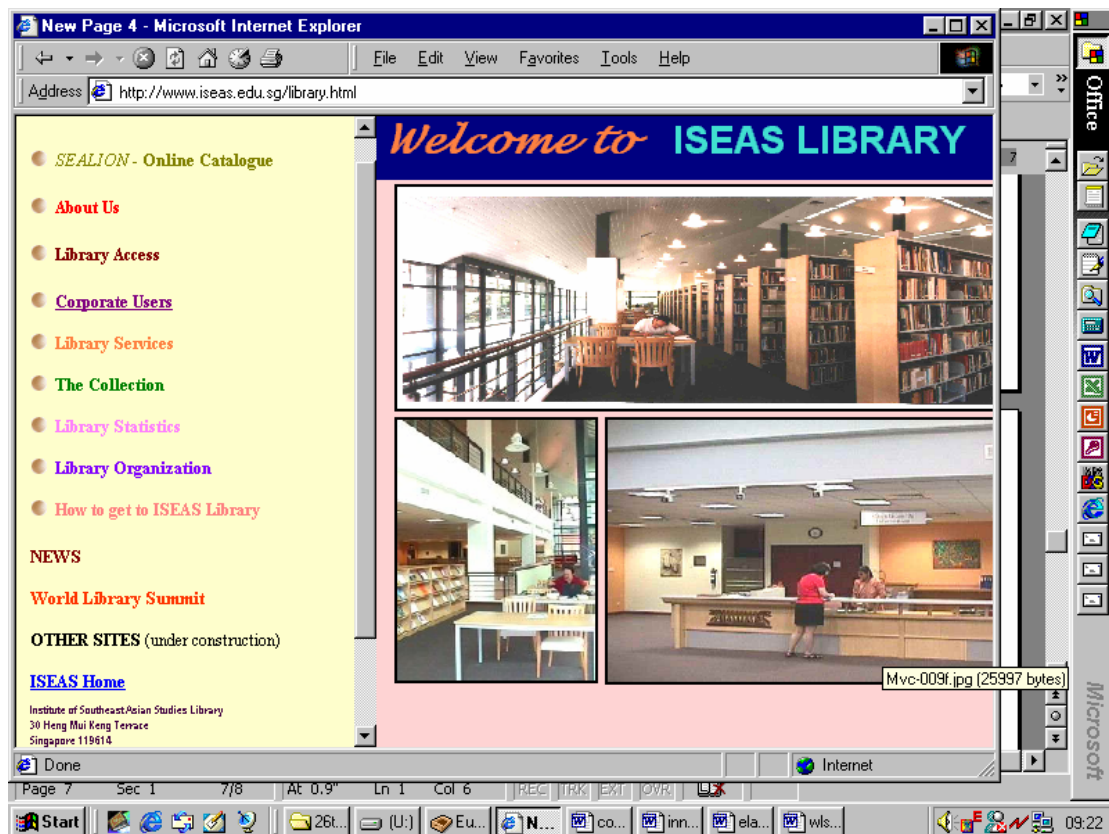Figure 1. Part of InfoMall showing the range of electronic resources available from the eLibraryHub

Figure 2. ISEAS Library home page