

# My IFLA congress experience

By Margaret Sinnott

## Snapshot

Margaret Sinnott explores her experiences at the 2018 conference of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) in Malaysia and makes a case for the importance of professional learning, collegiality and networking.

Attending the IFLA World Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in August 2018 was an experience that I will never forget. I was supported in attending this Conference through being the recipient of the School Library Association of Victoria John Ward Award, a Teacher Librarian Award, in 2017. The Award provided a professional learning grant and with support from Emmanuel College (Warrnambool, Victoria) where I am the Learning Resource Centre Coordinator for a secondary school with just over 1200 students, I was able to attend the Congress.

The Congress brought together over 3,500 delegates from across the world to listen to 250 speakers during 500 sessions. IFLA is a world library organisation, the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users and has members in over 140 countries.



From the opportunity to meet with and work with librarians from across the world, to attending workshops, viewing the best library designs, participating in School Libraries and Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section sessions and visiting the local city libraries, the Congress provided an all-encompassing experience.

At these meetings, visits and workshops, I was able to hear and learn from the many library personnel from around the world who are passionate about libraries and who work to promote and improve all types of libraries. Working as a school library manager/teacher librarian, I chose meetings, library visits and workshops that would link in with my role at school.

For me, the World Congress began with me attending the School library pre conference, the School Library Satellite Meeting at the Ministry of Education in Kuala Lumpur, where school library personnel gathered for the day from Malaysia, France, America, Australia, Japan, Portugal and Canada to workshop the IFLA School Library Guidelines (2nd revised edition) publication.

During the workshop many ideas were discussed and information shared about the role and style of school libraries in each of the countries represented. I was able to give input into how

we as a school and as a district library network, have begun exploring the 'IFLA School Library Guidelines' and how we have used some of the information in our Library Procedures Manual for staff to use.

In 2015, before I even thought about or thought possible that I would be able to attend a World Library Congress, I had found and used the 'IFLA School Library Guidelines' in library documentation. It is a publication full of useful, sound ideology that can be used by all types and sizes of school libraries. With the aim '...to ensure that all students and teachers have access to effective school library programs and services, delivered by qualified school library personnel...' (p9), the publication assists school libraries in developing goals, frameworks and programs to provide the best learning experiences for the students.

The IFLA Conference presented opportunities to learn about library trends and current research and activities from across the world. There was much discussion about open access to resources, assisting libraries to maintain standards and to develop, the shift to being people focussed rather than being book or resource focussed, connecting with users, the importance of design spaces for users, the training of library staff, maintaining young library professionals and about all who work in libraries being advocates for libraries.

I attended library tours visiting the National Library of Malaysia, public and school libraries (each Library tour had a police escort to allow us to get to the libraries in an efficient way) and attended conference sessions on Libraries for Children and Young Adults, Coaching, IFLA Global Vision, Designing Inclusive Libraries, Literacy, Sustainable Development Goals For Libraries, School Libraries and the IFLA Public Library of the Year Awards to name a few.

Delegates at the Conference were invited to donate some books to be given to Malaysian libraries and schools. From Emmanuel College I donated some picture books about Australia and a copy of the winning books (with permission of the students) from the Year 8 English Picture Book Unit.



There were sessions to attend on the IFLA Map of the World where national library associations and individual libraries are invited to update library statistics, contributing to the bigger picture of libraries.

Most memorable for me was the opportunity to spend each day of the Conference meeting and learning from library professionals from around the world, from those working in school libraries, heads of international library organisations including Christine Mackenzie, President – elect of IFLA, Katy Manck, President of International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), those training students in librarianship at universities, delegates from all types of libraries

(public, school, health, law, private) and students currently studying librarianship and the trade exhibitors showing new products such as the library robot and the book cleaning machines.



The theme of the World Congress was 'Transform Libraries, Transform Societies'. For each of the participants of the Congress, they have played their part in transforming libraries and helping to transform their communities. The IFLA World Congress enabled library-minded people from across the globe to meet, learn from each other and support each other in improving the resources, the thinking and knowledge capabilities, the reading and literacy capabilities, personal and interpersonal capabilities and learning management capabilities (p17-18) through the library that they are involved with.

For further information about the IFLA organisation please visit [www.ifla.org](http://www.ifla.org)

With thanks to Emmanuel College and the School Library Association of Victoria for supporting me in being able to attend the IFLA World Congress.

## References

IFLA School Libraries Section Standing Committee. (2015), *IFLA School Library Guidelines*, 2nd revised edition, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, Netherlands.

**Margaret Sinnott** is a teacher librarian and Learning Resource Centre Coordinator at Emmanuel College, Warrnambool, Victoria, a secondary school with 1200 plus students. Margaret has a passion for encouraging students to want to read and to learn how to best complete and present their research. Margaret is the organiser of library professional development for the CEO for local and district schools.