

IFLA Preconference, 19-21st August, Rome Italy

Digital Information for Democracy: Management, Access and Preservation

Summary: This is the best section for COSLA. It is the most accessible and the most flexible. The meeting in Rome brought together more than 180 professionals from more than 50 nations- of the 80 which are national or other members/countries. Because of its mission to serve parliaments, it is concerned with a wide range of subject matters and in some depth; public documents and all information of governmental units; and profoundly concerned to public outreach and education. It seeks partnerships with university and public libraries and archives- including museum special collections.

Of all of IFLA, these folks are most like us- of necessity, pragmatic dreamers who hold their ideals in their hearts, not necessarily in their marketing.

This section has matured since I found them first in 1993. Sara Parker also invested her IFLA time with those folks and actually served as an officer.

The papers range from prosaic to the philosophical- most somewhere in the middle of exposition of projects, accomplishment, issues, concerns and even sharing of failures. What impressed me most this time was the acknowledgement of the stark realities we often face- information access for policy makers who may not wish to be confused with facts from libraries-or anyone else.

Knowing clients, performing needs assessments, environmental scans and reality checks were evident in the papers. I have brought back the ones translated into English and available on site. I will make sure they get to AMR and you all get a list of what is available. Either Arizona or AMR can scan any you would like to read.

Some special publications:

Informing Democracy- Building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs. Geneva 22 October 2008.

Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites- Inter-Parliamentary Union, March 2009.

Overall Themes- increasing use of technology to reach out to citizens- especially the young to interest them in the workings and decisions of their government.

Concern with the reality of E-government with its implications for preservation and for organization; who is allowed to do what with which information? Sound familiar?

They struggle as we all struggle- what is the role we must play from our place in government and how do we manage to achieve the privilege of fulfilling it. We are all in pursuit of our unique contribution- defining and fulfilling it!

The factors most discussed as determining the role of the parliamentary library was defined were:

- Size of parliament and ability to work directly with members
- Nature of democracy- mature or emergency
- Number of political parties
- Who has access to materials and/or research?
- Whether or not separate research units are part of parliament
- The overall size and training of parliamentary staff, and of course
- Budget, space, personnel, collections

An interesting summation was offered-

Know your members

Who do they care about?

Whose advice do they take? (or do they only follow their own ideas?)

What sanctions do they respond/react to?

Eg: Is it only reelection?

I especially liked the idea that we are all engaged in guerilla warfare- mission to inform parliament.

A small taste, sans pasta, from Rome.