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The European Conference on Information Literacy

An international research-practice nexus

One of the indicators of the strong international presence of information literacy (IL) is the number of conferences that are dedicated to this topic. These conferences include satellite meetings of the Information Literacy Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LI-LAC), the Workshop on Instruction in Library Use (WILU) held in Canada since 1972, and the NordINFOLIT conferences held in the Nordic countries since 1999.

In the first "International Insights" column published in May 2016, Jesús Lau described how IL research and practice are advancing around the world. This column introduces the history, background and organization, conference structure and audience, gaps and challenges, and future plans for one of the events that Lau mentioned: the European Conference on Information Literacy (ECIL).

History of ECIL: The beginnings

ECIL is the result of the influence of supportive partners and the energies of individuals. Patronage and support have come from UNESCO and IFLA. ECIL's launch and continuation were due to the dedication of two library and information science (LIS) professors: Serap Kurbanoglu (Department of Information Management of Hacettepe University-Turkey) and Sonja Špiranec (Department of Informa-

tion and Communication Sciences of Zagreb University-Croatia).

In 2008, Kurbanoglu organized an UNESCO-sponsored train-the-trainer IL workshop in Turkey, and Špiranec was one of the workshop participants.¹ The three-day workshop, led by Forest W. (Woody) Horton Jr. and Albert Boekhorst, was one of twelve workshops delivered for UNESCO in various locations around the world.² Kurbanoglu and Špiranec met three years later at an European Union Erasmus Intensive Programme where, inspired by continuing interest in IL, they made the decision to develop an international conference on research in IL.³ The conference was to be held annually in one European country with a truly international scope and strong research focus because existing European IL conferences were, to a great extent, practice-oriented.

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Over the following two years, Kurbanoglu and Spiranec built the ECIL website.⁴ Their colleague, Necip Erol Olcay, designed the ECIL logo featuring the stylized face of an owl, denoting wisdom. And they established ECIL committees. The first ECIL conference took place October 22-25, 2013, at the Harbiye Military Museum & Culture Site in Istanbul, Turkey. Subsequent ECIL conferences took place in Dubrovnik, Croatia (October 20-23, 2014), Tallinn, Estonia (October 19-22, 2015), and Prague, Czech Republic (October 10-13, 2016). Calls for papers are out now for ECIL 2017, which will take place September 18-21, in Saint-Malo, France.

ECIL: Background and organization

ECIL's mission is to provide an annual forum for individuals interested in IL to share information about their research and practice. The call for participation invites broad exploration on the range of literacies (e.g., civic, digital, and visual), IL delivery (e.g., curricular design and e-learning), IL in specific settings (e.g., by type of library), IL training for information professionals, and targeted IL (e.g., children and youth, and members of disadvantaged groups), to name a few topics. More recently, calls to participate at ECIL invite contributions around a theme such as "Information Literacy in the Green Society" (2015), "Information Literacy in the Inclusive Society" (2016), or "Workplace Information Literacy" (2017).

ECIL posts the conference calendar on its website and issues calls for paper submissions ten months prior to the conference date. Kurbanoglu and Spiranec are assisted by three committees and an editorial team. They serve as cochairs for the 130-member Standing Committee for which Paul G. Zurkowski is honorary chair.

The Programme Committee, with nearly 100 people, assists the cochairs by reviewing abstracts and papers. The Local Organizing Committee takes care of registration, local events, and the program. The Editorial Team reviews and prepares the abstracts monograph and proceedings. Each ECIL has supportive and sponsoring partners, including UNESCO, IFLA,

professional associations, government agencies, colleges and universities, LIS schools, and companies such as EBSCO and Thomson Reuters.

ECIL: Conference structure, audience, and international impact

From its beginnings, ECIL has offered a robust and varied approach in sharing content over four days, starting with a keynote opening session. Paul Zurkowski, who is credited with coining the phrase IL, delivered the first keynote in 2013. Since then, other keynote speakers include Christine Bruce and Indrajit Banerjee (Istanbul, 2013); David Bawden and Michael Eisenberg (Dubrovnik, 2014); Susan Danby, Carol Collier Kuhlthau, and Sonja Livingstone (Tallinn, 2015); and Tara Brabazon and Jan A. G. M. vanDijk (Prague, 2016).

Each morning of the conference features one or two invited speeches. Afterwards, attendees choose a parallel session with papers grouped around a theme or sessions highlighting best practices. Workshops provide hands-on exploration of topics such as measuring IL competency or engaging youth in IL. Other programs include discussions, a doctoral forum, posters, and PechaKucha. Social events include a welcome reception, gala dinner, and pre- and post-ECIL tours. At closing, a rapporteur summarizes the presentations, themes, and discussions, and makes recommendations. Past rapporteurs included Ralph Catts, Bill Johnston, Sheila Webber, and Stephane Goldstein.

The call for presentations for ECIL 2013 resulted in 396 proposals with 235 (59 percent) accepted. ECIL 2016 received 240 proposals with 180 (75 percent) accepted. Each year, presenters represented nearly 60 different countries. Audiences included attendees from Asia, the Americas, Africa, Oceania, and Europe.

The broad spectrum of information professionals meeting in formal sessions and informal social venues creates a fertile environment for international networking and collaborations. Some participants have formed research teams. For example, a study performed at one institution and presented

in 2014 has grown into the Academic Reading Format International Study (ARFIS), an ongoing collaboration involving researchers in more than 30 countries on four continents.

ARFIS publications can now be found in the mainstream library literature. The ARFIS research group now meets at each ECIL. Other outcomes noted in comments by attendees in conference evaluations and private conversations express how learning about IL developments, programs, and research beyond their immediate situations has positively impacted their own work and agendas through the expansion of their perspectives and visions of IL.

One North American professional stated, for example, that attending a presentation comparing IL competencies and standards from agencies around the world forced her to appreciate subtle differences from the ACRL track. This had an immediate impact on her work with international students in her home institution. ECIL colleagues from Asia and Africa, recognizing the value of a regional conference with international participation, have expressed interest in developing their own local IL conferences.

Gaps and challenges

ECIL emerged as a result of increased global attention on IL. It has demonstrated that well-organized efforts can lead to successfully delivered local events. ECIL is gaining recognition as an important information-sharing venue and will continue to retain its name and logo, remaining the European Conference on Information Literacy. While increasingly international in attendance, conference themes allow presenters to provide national, regional, and cross-border views on issues.

In summarizing ECIL 2016, Sheila Webber described how speakers focusing on the theme of inclusion brought “more of a political aspect to the conference,” as seen in presentations on refugees and resettlement and on the views of IL among French librarians after the attacks of January 2015.⁵

Still, like any face-to-face event, ECIL faces challenges of extending its reach. ECIL

is open to any attendee and provides multiple options for presenters. ECIL’s main challenge is to attract an audience beyond the LIS profession to include educators, media specialists, employers, policy makers, and others interested in the broad field of IL. Adoption of special conference themes, such as green issues, inclusivity, and workplace literacy, are efforts to expand both the audience and the focus of the conference, yet the impact of these efforts are uncertain. It may eventually become a challenge to retain its freshness and focus, while still attracting an audience.

There is some evidence that ECIL has resulted in an increase in publications about IL. In 2016, Virkus analyzed citations of IL publications in *Web of Science*. She indicated that while “there were only few research IL publications” in the early 1990s, she counted 347 publications in 2013. She explained that nearly half (168 or 48 percent) of these publications resulted from the first ECIL.⁶

Future plans

ECIL, as a relatively new event, plans to continue with its core vision, which for now has proven to be very successful: to be a truly global voice in IL and a platform to discuss IL from the widest possible range of perspectives from different parts of the world, different countries, and differing cultures. ECIL intends to continue serving as a meeting point for research and practice. Both the international dimension and the research-practice nexus make ECIL different from other IL-focused events in Europe. As an event rather than an organization, ECIL is also situated in the enviable position of not being subject to bylaws or structure that might restrict its focus or voice.

ECIL offers a versatile platform for presenters and their audiences to share, discuss, and debate the increasing importance of IL. We predict that the roles of IL, as both a process and a philosophy, will only be more essential in assisting citizens in locating, understanding, summarizing, and sharing information as they face ever increasing societal changes, confusion, and mixed messages in the arenas of “fake news” and “alternative facts.” ECIL’s future plans

include addressing the challenge of involving different stakeholders. IL has multifaceted aspects and implications that open possibilities for engagement beyond the LIS field. One way of doing this is choosing challenging main conference themes of societal and political relevance. For example, with workplace literacy as the main conference theme for ECIL 2017, we hope to include human resources specialists, career advisors, and trade units.

In 2016 ECIL organized an introductory pre-conference event as a participant-driven meeting about critical information literacy, the CIL Unconference.⁷ This experience is prompting us to consider introducing other fresh conference formats. This way, we hope to attract younger participants at the beginning of their research or professional careers, who might find such casual formats more attractive.

What might serve ECIL best is to conduct a thorough evaluation of its attendance, conference content, review of evaluations by attendee and rapporteur reports, citation analysis of presented papers, and, now, the published conference proceedings. Such an evaluation might also include comparisons with other international IL conferences and, thus, result in a mapping of global perspectives on IL. This mapping might involve examining the missions and activities of other organizations, including the International Alliance for Information Literacy and the European Network on Information Literacy to ascertain the potential, need, and benefits of future information sharing or collaboration.

Notes

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2. Albert K. Boekhorst, Forest Woody Horton, "Training-the-Trainers in Information Literacy (TTT) Workshops Project, Final Report to UNESCO," *International Information & Library Review* 41, no. 4 (2009): 224–230. .

3. Mihaela Banek Zorica, Lucia Amante, Gloria Bastos, Serap Kurbanoglu, Sonja Špiranec, Yasar Tonta, and Vlasta Zabukovec, "Erasmus Intensive Programme: Information and Communication Technology in Supporting the Educational Process," <http://yunus.hacettepe.edu.tr/~tonta/yayinlar/tonta-zorica-erasmus-IP-programme.pdf> (accessed December 18, 2016).

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5. Sheila Webber, "ECIL Closing #ecil2016," Information Literacy Weblog, October 13, 2016, <http://information-literacy.blogspot.com/search/label/ecil2016> (accessed January 25, 2017).

6. Sirje Virkus, "Knowledge Management and Information Literacy: An Exploratory Analysis," in: S. Kurbanoglu, et al (eds), *Information Literacy: Key to an Inclusive Society*, CCIS, vol. 676 (in press) (Berlin: Springer).

7. CIL Unconference, <http://cilunconference.wixsite.com/home> (accessed January 7, 2017). *ZZ*

("Introducing library students . . .," continues from page 128)

Notes

1. QuasiCon 2016, "Schedule," ALA Student Chapter at the University of Michigan School of Information, last accessed September 14, 2016, <https://quasicon2016.wordpress.com/schedule/>.

2. "Unusual Stuff to Borrow," Ann Arbor District Library, last accessed September 14, 2016, www.aadl.org/catalog/browse/unusual.

3. ACRL, "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," ALA, January 11, 2016, www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

4. We would like to acknowledge and thank both the graduate students who started QuasiCon and the Planning Committee volunteers for their innovation, dedication, and hard work to create, plan, and host QuasiCon.

Thanks to the alumni who generously shared their memories and reflections on QuasiCon. We would also like to thank all past attendees for helping library students develop professionally. *ZZ*