

Report on the 4th Leipziger Kongress für Information und Bibliothek, 15-18 März.

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The 4th Leipziger Kongress für Information und Bibliothek was held in Leipzig, Germany from March 15-18. Thanks to generous grants from Bibliothek und Information International and the Goethe Institute, I was able to attend this important information and communication forum. Although I was not able to take advantage of every opportunity offered by the conference due to unforeseen travel delays, what I took away from this conference was beyond my expectations.

The theme of the conference was Menschen Wollen Wissen- Bibliotheken im 21. Jahrhundert: International, Interkulturell, Interaktiv. Despite the broad scope of the theme, the conference organizers managed to put together many panels on related topics. For example the presentations of the three panels that I attended were distinct in their topics and their problematic, but the common themes were apparent. Most presentations were informative and intellectually enriching.

The success of the conference was largely due to the help from the people who worked at the information booths, the important contributions of the panel moderators and the enthusiasm of the audiences. For most presentations the rooms were packed, and many attendees had to stand in corners or sit on the floor. The interest of the audience was manifest in the Q & A exchanges some of which were too short to my taste. I heard two panel moderators conclude the discussions with "wir treffen uns nächstes Jahr in Berlin," a clear sign that they attendees were eager to continue the discussion as soon as possible.

Two of the three panels that I attended dealt with the same topic, "Vermittlung von Informationskompetenz an den Hochschulen," but approached this question from different angles: while the first panel presented praxis-oriented concepts, the second dealt with the state of affairs of media competence and the strategies for developing and reinforcing it. The first panel met in the afternoon of March 16th. The majority of the presenters were my colleagues from North America. Tatiana Usova talked about the role of technology as a teaching and learning tool and showed how tutorials, library guides and social software tools are used at her library in Edmonton, Alberta (Canada); Kate Brooks from Minneapolis, Minnesota underlined and demonstrated the impact of personal information management on media and information competence; Thea Linqvist drew on her professional experience at the University of Boulder, Colorado, to present the ways in which information literacy skills can be integrated into

undergraduate education. There was also a very informative presentation by Anke Wittich from the University of Hannover, Germany on the methods of teaching information content. All of these talks were appreciated by the audience and elicited an important discussion.

The second panel met in the afternoon of March 17. Christine Gläser, the third speaker gave an extensive definition of media competence which covered and extended the concept of information literacy as defined by the Association of Colleges and Research Libraries (ACRL). Olaf Eingenbrodt emphasized the multifaceted character of the concept of information competence and illustrated its use in different library service structures. Philipp Stalder warned against the risks of the inflation of the information literacy approach; his presentation foregrounded the importance of information evaluation and personal responsibility as intrinsic components of information competence. I was the last speaker. My paper dealt with the expertise required of teachers of media competence. The claim I wanted to make in my presentation was that an effective competence of media teaching ultimately rests on the teacher's awareness of the ethical dimension of his pedagogical practice which should be erotic through and through. As for the presentation itself, I mumbled it through due to lack of time, extreme fatigue and sleeplessness. This leads me to a brief explanation of the unforeseen travel delays mentioned in the introductory paragraph of this report.

The weather in the USA was not clement on the day of my trip to Germany. My flight from Urbana-Champaign to New York was diverted to Albany airport from where I had to take a bus to complete my trip. I arrived in New York late that night only to learn that my flight to Leipzig via Berlin was also cancelled. I eventually boarded another flight the following night to Frankfurt. It took me 7 hours to go from Frankfurt to my hotel which was located not in Leipzig but in Peissen, in the middle of nowhere. In order to attend the conference I had to take a taxi each day from my hotel to Halle, and then a 1 hour train from Halle to Leipzig. I eventually moved into NH Hotel, located on the premises of the Buchmesse on March 17, 15 minutes before my presentation which I started in a state of total exhaustion due to excitement and extreme fatigue.

Due to the circumstances described, I missed the lunch with my American colleagues and the visit to the Dresden State Library, both events organized by Shawn Whately from the Goethe Institute (Toronto). But I managed to take a memorable guided tour of Leipzig. The tour showed many aspects of this city's history including the role it played in the economic development of Europe, whether this was through its advanced railroad system, or its publishing industry, which was number one in Europe. I was particularly moved by two vestiges of the city's history: the first was the colossal and imposing Volkerschlachtendenkmal, a must-see monument dedicated to the battle of Leipzig during the war with Napoleon's troops, and the second the former headquarters of the Stasi, the secret police during the communist era. The history of Leipzig rhymes also with

music, philosophy and literature, and our tour guide did not fail to evoke the tumultuous relationships between Leipzig and the great composer Richard Wagner, its native son, nor did he forget to mention the short but historically significant Leipziger residence of Friedrich Nietzsche, nicknamed the philosopher with a hammer, or show us the magnificent Gohlischer Schloeschen where the poet Friedrich Schiller wrote his famous Ode to Joy. There were several historic traces of the vibrant industrial and entrepreneurial spirit of the city. One trace that impressed me much was the unfinished project of linking Leipzig to Hamburg through a canal.

I also attended the opening of the book fair, a useful complement and implement of the conference. The fair was a complement in the sense that it created a great meeting place where people from all ages, all walks of life and all cultural and national horizons could interact and exchange ideas and feelings in a festive atmosphere. It was also an implement because it exposed the conference attendees to the vast array of local and international information resources.

Overall, my attendance of the 4th Leipziger Kongress für Information und Bibliothek was an enriching experience. I am grateful to BID and Goethe-Institut for their financial support.