

BI-International Grant Report: International Conference on Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries 2011

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First of all, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the committee of BI-International Grant. Your generosity helped to make my trip to Berlin, Germany possible. I had a memorable time in Berlin: the conference was very informative and well-organized; my presentation was successfully delivered; the visit to Humboldt University Library is eye-opening, and most importantly, I have learned so much from presentations of keynote speakers, short paper, long paper, posters and demos. Doubtlessly, the BI-International grant played an indispensable role for the library professionals to learn from each other, exchange ideas, and develop their professional skills.

Introduction

Year 2006 Albanian government received loan from the World Bank to develop the Education Excellence and Equity Project. A major part of initiatives is to improve the quality of learning and teaching conditions for all the students and teachers of primary and secondary schools. To set up a digital library that will provide teachers and students online learning resources becomes relevant. But because the country does not have the expertise to accomplish the task, the World Bank assisted the Albanian government by helping recruit a DL consultant whose responsibilities are, but limited to, defining the Terms of Reference (ToR) including identifying key stakeholders, defining system specifications, setting content selection guidelines, providing a 3-5 year strategic plan including budget projection. I was very fortunate to be selected as the consultant. My focus on digital library development and management started in 2005 when I had the opportunity to work in Sacred Heart University Library as Head of Digital Library Development. Through years of managing and implementing various types of digital projects and extensive study on the subject, I have accumulated the knowledge and gained experience in managing such project. Beginning of 2011, I visited the country twice and completed the task in March.

After I came back to the United State, I found 2011 TPDL (International Conference on Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries 2011) would be held in Berlin, and one of the conference topics

was to focus on user experience. Since the experience I had would be a typical example that represents the obstacles and opportunities that developing countries encounter when initiating and planning to set up a digital library, I believe it could be a good case study. Therefore, I wrote the short paper with the title “Developing National Digital Library of Albania for Pre-university schools: a case study” and the paper was accepted by the TPDL conference. With the economic restraint these days, traveling international is not very supported in most of institution. When I found on TPDL site that BI-International is an organization that supports international library professionals’ traveling by providing the grant, I contacted BI-International to find out if I can receive the support. To my gratefulness, I was granted the financial support.

Conference

The International Conference on Theory and Practice of Digital Libraries was the 15th annual conference that has covered researches and best practices worldwide in digital libraries. The conference was held in Berlin from September 25 - 29 in School of Library and Information Science, Berlin, Germany.

I arrived in Berlin on the evening of September 24. The next day, September 25, I visited the university, the site for the conference, and went back to hotel to prepare for my presentation.

Day 1, September 26

I went to the site early and the onsite staff members were really friendly and helpful. I received the grant in cash. Before the conference started, I put up my poster on the designated stand. The conference began with two distinguished keynote speakers’ presentations. They both made very impressive presentations; especially Thomas Hofmann’s speech was so useful to all types of libraries.

The teaser session kicked in after the coffee break. The teaser session gave a brief idea about who would present and what the presentation was about. It was a very useful arrangement since it saved time for attendees to decide what sessions would interest them.

After the teaser session, the main conference started. Before lunch I stayed in Rm110, in which the presentations focused on topics of Semantics and Interoperability I was very much impressed by the technical in-depth of these papers.

Lunch was between 1:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., which provided the opportunity and time for attendees talk to each other and make connections.

In the afternoon sessions, I was very interested in the presentations in Rm 115 which were about Systems and Architectures. There was a lot of information I believe applies to us. I not only took the notes, but asked questions and contact information. The afternoon session ended at 6:00 followed by 2nd teaser session. I had a chance to briefly introduce my presentation.

The reception was both enjoyable and informative since the poster and demo sessions occurred at the same time. We all enjoyed the food and drink while visiting the poster and demo stands to learn from our peers. I had opportunity to talk to people who stopped by my poster and showed their interest in the project.



2nd Day, September 27

The day started with keynote speaker, Moira Norrie's presentation. It was both interesting and informative, and after that we had coffee break. After the coffee break, I continued my focus on Semantic and Interoperability presentations. The lunch hour was good time to make connection and talk to peers again. In the afternoon, I stayed in Rm. 115 in which the main theme of presentations was about User Interaction and Information Visualization. My presentation would be the last paper of the day.

Presentation



My presentation was concentrating on the necessities for developing countries (in my case, Albania) to have digital repositories, the challenges these countries face when setting up the digital libraries both economically and technologically, and opportunities these countries can take advantage of. The presentation got positive feedbacks.

Visiting Humboldt University

One of the most memorable activities the conference arranged for attendees was to visit Humboldt University Library. We were guided by the onsite staff and got to the library by train. As soon as we saw the library, we were all stunned: the library was incredible. We were assigned to a tour guide, a librarian. He showed us to the locker room where we left our jackets or other stuff. Even the locker room was very welcoming. First of all, Mr. gave us a brief introduction of the library history and the building history, and then he started to guide us to tour the library. He showed us how automation of checking-in and checking-out work. Unquestionably, everyone's reaction was "wow". What impressed me the most was not only the design of the library which shows the careful consideration of efficiency and sense of aesthetics but also the large collection of all kinds of printed materials that run several floors and rich electronic records. The rare book collection and accessibility of these rare books were so amazing! We were told the library is the largest and free access to every citizen of Berlin, which makes me think how fortunate the Berliners are.



Conference Dinner

The day was full of information and excitement. The nice way to finish the day was the conference dinner. The choice of the dinner restaurant could not be better. The historical place reflects the creativity and innovation of Berliners! The best paper awards that recognized the contributions of those libraries and individuals encourage more people to excel in the digital library field; the food was superb, and the beautiful surroundings made the food every tasty. I enjoyed myself so much!

Day 3, September 28

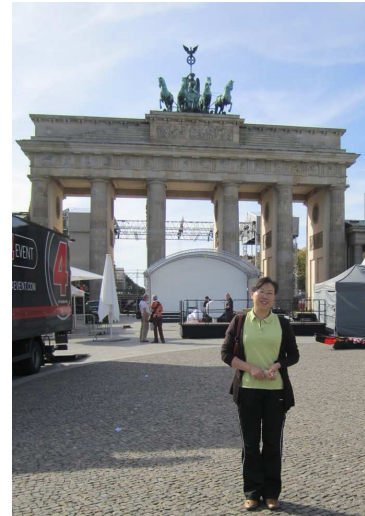
Even it was the last day of conference, the programs were equally useful and interesting. Of course the keynote speaker's presentation was very insightful. I think most of us if not all agree that constructing digital libraries is unquestionably challenging because of not only technological capacities and capabilities of different organizations, and the scales of the digital library but also the complex natures of DL such as human languages and its the implications. I think to anyone who is involved in the development of a digital library, no matter he/she is a developer, or simply a librarian, a digital library is not only a collection of digitized or born-digital information but also the reflection of intellectual and social acknowledgment to the importance of scholarly communication.

When the keynote presentation finished, I attended the session of Europeana. The methodology of improving the search engine was very useful to all types of digital libraries, small or big, and has far-reaching implication to the development of DL.

After lunch, I visited Berlin, an amazing city in the world, in which modern civilization mingles with historical traces. The spirit and hospitality of people of Berlin added one more nice touch to the whole trip and put a period to this unforgettable experience.

Conclusion

The whole experience to TPDL conference in Berlin has significant meanings to both my personal and professional development. I will certainly continue my research on the subject field. As a matter of fact, because my task to help Albanian government develop their first DL is still under way, I am sure there will be second or more research papers to further discuss the topic. In conclusion, I must confess that after I came back from the conference, I feel energized and stimulated.



Acknowledgement

BI-International Grant. It's your financial support that made my trip not only possible but more worry-free and enjoyable as well.

Sacred Heart University. Even though the economical restrain limits the opportunities for personnel traveling, the support I received certainly encourages me to work harder.