BETH

Bibliothèques Européennes de Théologie

BETH Bulletin 2024

No 02

Hannie Riley and Jussi Hyvärinen

Empowered by
the 32nd EBLIDA Conference

Hannie Riley

College Librarian, Wycliffe Hall, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

As the vice-president of BETH, I was privileged to represent BETH in the 32nd EBLIDA[1] (the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations) Annual Conference in the Torre do Tombo National Archives in Lisbon, Portugal from 9th to 10th April 2024. This conference was also a joint convention with NAPLE[2] (National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe) and RL:EU[3] (Resourcing Libraries: Connecting Libraries to EU Resources) so it was wonderful to be able to attend all three events in one go, alongside over 150 participants from all over Europe.

This year's EBLIDA Conference was particularly interesting and relevant to me as their chosen theme was "Charting the Future of Libraries". At last year's BETH conference, we discussed the challenges of ecclesiastical libraries in Europe, so it was an excellent opportunity to hear a diverse range of perspectives, from library professionals to policymakers, educators, and advocates, creating a rich tapestry of insights and ideas. As I reflect on the discussions, keynotes, and workshops, a few points emerge that resonate deeply with the evolving landscape of libraries and librarianship.

[1] https://eblida.org/
[2] https://naple.eu/
[3] https://resourcing-libraries.eu/

First and foremost, the conference highlighted the urgent need for libraries to adapt to the changing needs of society. In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, demographic shifts, and socio-economic changes, libraries must embrace innovation and reinvent themselves as vibrant hubs of knowledge, community engagement, and lifelong learning. The keynote speech by Rolf Hapel addressed the importance of real community engagement, expanding library programmes and events, and reimagining library spaces as dynamic service centres, showing a deep commitment to serving the diverse needs of their communities.

One of the most pressing challenges discussed was the need to rethink library staffing and training strategies. The panel discussion on the relationship between future libraries and librarians highlighted the inadequacy of traditional training programmes in preparing library and information professionals for the complexities of the modern world. Speakers emphasised the importance of cultivating a diverse set of soft skills, including learning ability, social and communication skills, and agile project management, to thrive in the ever-changing library landscape.

Another critical theme was the role of libraries in promoting digital literacy and combating misinformation. In an age where information is abundant but often unreliable, libraries play a crucial role in helping users navigate the digital landscape effectively. Therefore, the importance of equipping library staff with the digital skills and competencies was discussed to support users in developing critical thinking skills, evaluating information sources, and leveraging digital technologies for learning and research. The workshops on AI and misinformation further explored these topics, offering practical strategies for leveraging technology to enhance library services while safeguarding against the spread of misinformation. Additionally, it must be said that the interactive escape room session prepared by OCLC (which challenged participants to recognise and combat misinformation) was a highlight of the conference, blending education with entertainment in a thought-provoking way.

On the second day, the RL:EU Conference, Digital Upskilling in Libraries, took place to present the resourcing libraries project, EU frameworks on digital competences, and EU funding programmes for libraries, including the digital education action plan, and the DigComp framework, as well as the Erasmus+ and CERV programmes.

The conference also gave us an introduction to various initiatives on digital up-skilling for libraries in Europe - and the Living Libraries session, in particular - which provided valuable opportunities to discover 10 inspiring EU-funded projects on digital literacies. Please see more details from their article on the website.[4]

Whilst the experience was overwhelmingly positive, a few constructive observations can be made. I noticed the predominant emphasis was on developing librarian professional skill sets for digital literacy and training library users in AI and information advancement, yet, there was a noticeable absence of discussion and training on inclusiveness and equality. Similarly, there was very little advocacy aimed at supporting national and international librarians and libraries in desperate need when considering the future of libraries. For example, addressing the pressing needs of libraries in regions like Ukraine, which are still struggling to survive amid prolonged conflict, was simply not present, and there were no concerns for smaller libraries with financial constraints in less financially stable countries.

Throughout the conference, there was a palpable sense of optimism and possibility as participants engaged in discussions shared best practices, and forged new connections. Attending such a conference as this has not only provided valuable insight into the current state of EU funding programmes but also offered a platform for networking, learning, and collective action. As I reflect on the conference, I am filled with a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm for the future of libraries in Europe. Moving forward, I am inspired to apply the opportunities and lessons learned for BETH, advocating for the continued relevance and vitality of our members' libraries in the digital age.

[4] https://resourcing-libraries.eu/over-100-participants-at-the-rleu-conference-on-digital-upskilling-in-libraries/