

The Fifteenth International Conference: Crimea 2008 Ukraine, Crimea, 7th-15th June 2008

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Introduction

The Fifteenth Jubilee International Conference (otherwise known as "Crimea 2008") was once again successfully held in the popular town of Sudak (which hosted the main event) and the satellite conference-resort cities of Alushta, Bakhchisarai, Belogorsk, Feodosia, Kerch, Koktebel and Sary Krym of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in the Ukraine from the 7th to the 15th of June 2008. The aim of the Crimea Conference is to explore, discuss and share experiences that deal with the development, problems and implementation of new information technologies in library and information activities and services. Many people, including conference organizers, participants and holidaymakers, are drawn to that part of the world because of the region's beauty, particularly the majestic mountains and valleys between the Black Sea and the Azov Sea. The area is also known for its unique history, dating back to the Roman and Ottoman Empires, which makes its presence felt in the architecture, agriculture, shores and diversified people of the region. On June the 8th, the Organizing Committee offered free one-day tours for all the conference participants to explore the Crimean Southern Coast, giving delegates the opportunity to visit the Nikita Botanical Garden; Vorontsov Palace in Alupka; Swallow Nest Castle, Yalta; Dzhur-Dzhur Waterfall and Marble Cavern; Sary Krym (Alexander Green Museum, Surb-Khach Armenian Monastery, Panteleymon Spring, Mosque, Madrasah, Alexander Green's Grave); and Arkhaderesse for elite wine tasting. See the location of Crimea, Southern Ukraine, below.

Map of Ukraine



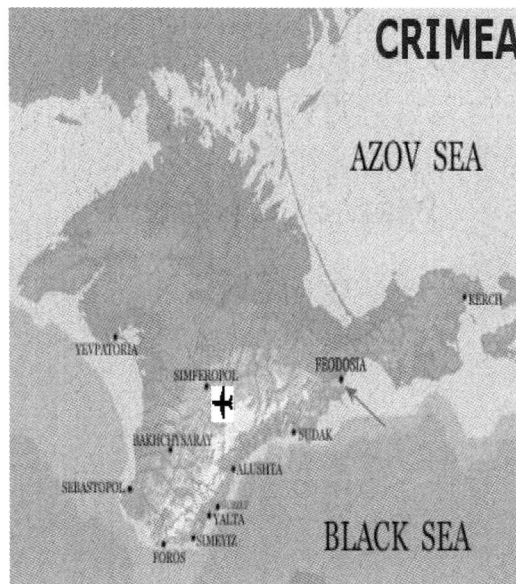
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Programme and events

The conference attracted over 1,800 participants from 33 countries, with Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan sending the largest number of delegates. Outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)/consisting of most countries of the former Soviet Union, were small delegations from Austria, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA, among others. The theme of the conference was "Electronic Resources and the Social Role of Libraries in the Future". Approximately 540 papers were presented, divided according to 15 sections, as follows:

1. Information Society and World-Wide Information Infrastructure, National Information Resources and National Libraries, International Co-operation Projects;
2. Automated and Corporate Library Systems and Technologies;
3. DigitalLibraries;
4. Libraries and Museums in the Global Information and Cultural Environment;
5. Library Science, Bibliography Science, and Bibliology;
6. Library Staff, Profession and Education;
7. Information and Linguistic Support of Library and Information Systems;
8. Ecological Information and Ecological Culture;
9. Information Market and Libraries Collection Development;
10. Public Access to Legal and Business Information - problems of Copyright, Library Intellectual and Material Property Protection;
11. Regional Libraries, Municipal Information and Regional Studies;
12. Reading and Information Literacy of Children and the Youth;
13. Medical Information: Libraries Role in Support of Scientific Research and Services for Physicians;
14. Information and Innovation Support of Education, Research and Management;
15. Internet and Internet Technologies in Library and Information Practice.

There were also seven workshops on different themes, seven 'round tables', information on two annual conferences (ILIAC and ELNIT), six general presentations and six presentations within the exhibition; poster papers/presentations, and video contests.



Significance of the conference

A lot of library and information oriented activities in contemporary literature are written about and disseminated in English, and therefore largely reach English speaking nations and communities, particularly those situated in the developed world. What goes on in Eastern Europe, in areas such as Russia and the Ukraine, and indeed in developing countries, hardly reaches the international academic and professional community predominantly because of language and economic barriers or bias. The CIS is on UNESCO's record as being in possession of the largest library centers, treasures

and systems in the world. For example, the former Soviet Union (in areas such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus etc) - according to the UNESCO report - was among the world's greatest producers of books (nearly 4,640,000 each year) and possessed the highest number of libraries (330,000). The country's information collection was one of the world's largest (over three billion volumes in total). Approximately seven titles per head of the region's population were printed annually. UNESCO for many years referred to the then Soviet achievements in the production and dissemination of information resources as a model to be emulated by other countries. This conference, which brings all these countries and their libraries together, is essentially considered to be one of the largest regional library and information conferences, second perhaps only to the IFLA and ALA conferences. The conference is significant in a number of ways. First and foremost, it may be measured by its magnitude, as attested to by the number of participants, conference papers, the variety of libraries and other cultural institutions represented, the number of activities that were mentioned, the number of countries represented, and the nature and calibre of its delegates, such as government ministers, mayors, vice-chancellors/rectors of colleges/universities and prominent members and scholars from the Arts and Culture department in countries other than the Ukraine. It is amazing that over 50 different activities, which occurred parallel to each other, were continuously fulfilled within the four days allocated to the professional part of the conference. Second, the conference is also impressive in its persistence - expanding and developing year by year and bringing on board more countries (like China) and variety into its organization and activities. For example, the number of delegates participating in the conference grew from 200 in 1995 to 1800 in 2008. This year (2008), the Crimea Conference was celebrating its anniversary - the Fifteenth Jubilee International Conference. Third, the venue of the conference is also part of its attraction as it is situated in one of the most popular and picturesque resort locations of the Ukraine South Coast, filled to capacity with natural beauty and splendour. The area is relaxing, and the cost of accommodation and subsistence in the magnificent conference rooms in these towns is affordable, which particularly suits foreign delegates. Fourth, people are warm, hospitable and accommodative, as demonstrated by lively multicultural events and concerts of the highest quality, and generous fourchette, banquets and receptions. Finally, at this event, we managed to represent Africa, South Africa and the University of Zululand through two well received conference papers. Dennis Ocholla's paper, entitled "Are African Libraries in the Knowledge and Information Society?" was presented under Section One: "Information Society and World-Wide Information Infrastructure, National Information Resources and National Libraries, International Co-operation Projects". The paper highlighted the concepts of knowledge and information society; interrogated the roles, functions, challenges and opportunities of libraries in society by using both theoretical and practical discourse based largely on African library environment examples and case studies; and concluded that libraries in Africa can act as engines driving today's knowledge and information society. Benefiting from his knowledge of the Russian language, Dennis also chaired a Session in Section Eight (Ecological Information and Ecological Culture) where a co-authored paper with Lyudmila Ocholla entitled "Research Output and Scientific Impact of Global Warming Research Productivity and Literature from 1980-2007: an Informetric Analysis"; was presented. In this second paper, they explored the courses and manifestation of global warming and used both descriptive and evaluative informetric techniques to analyze global warming research using published literature as indexed and reflected in three key bibliographic databases from the Web of Science, namely the Science Citation Index, Social Sciences Citation Index and Arts and Humanities Citation Index. The paper provided useful information on building research policy and evaluating global warming and productivity measurement in a burgeoning domain that is likely to benefit information service delivery. Quite unexpected was the declaration of Dennis Ocholla as Mister Conference for his resourcefulness where he was also honoured with a beautiful golden trophy that he brought with him to South Africa.

Conclusion

Although cultural centers and libraries are facing financial crisis' all over the world, this region is facing even harsher constraints due to reduced traditional government subsidies. It is encouraging to note that most libraries that were hailed by UNESCO for their impact on the community are still largely operational and therefore continuing with their cultural crusade of enlightenment, as detected by our visits to some libraries in the Ukraine and Russia. Problems of automation in the case of library activities, functions and services seem to be drawing greater attention, and there is eminent hope, in the eyes of colleagues, that these problems will be resolved sooner rather than later if government support and the support of friends of libraries are forthcoming. In the annual conference speech by Prof. Yakov Shreiberg, the conference's Chair for 15 years, he revealed that Russia has 130,000 libraries, of which 49,000 are public libraries. Sadly, out of the 49,000 public libraries for example, 17% are automated and only 7% have Internet access. The conference's main theme over the last nine years has focused on ICT that could deal with this problem. The strength of the region lies in its strong library tradition, with plenty of qualified manpower. The Sixteenth International Conference, "Crimea 2009", will focus on new and developing issues and can be reviewed on the conference website. Readers are reminded not to

forget to read the new traditional informative and scholarly annual plenary speech of the conference by Professor Yakov Shraiberg (Chairman of the International Organizing Committee) entitled "Libraries Within the Legal and Technological Evolution of Social Progress" (2008). The paper summarizes conference trends and suggests scholarly and professional challenges, largely in ICT. There is a lot to learn from the Crimea Conference. For further information and access to the conference proceedings, visit: <http://www.iliac.org/crimea2008>; <http://www.gpntb.ru/win/inter-events/crimea2008>. Our conference papers can also be accessed at <http://www.lis.uzulu.ac.za>