



### Reflections from the IPC chair of EAHIL 2023 Workshop in Trondheim, Norway, 12-16 June 2023

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“We know what we are, but not what we may be”, said Ophelia in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The same might be said for librarians. The uncertainty that has been prominent in our lives, particularly since the pandemic, has been felt by many librarians, too. In uncertain times, we can easily become engrossed in the nitty-gritty of everyday business and forget to look up and catch the big picture. This was the background for the theme of our workshop.

#### The EAHIL 2023 bid

The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) sent an expression of interest to EAHIL in early 2020, before the pandemic. The bid was for a workshop, to be held in Trondheim in 2023, and it outlined the conference venue and suggested social events as well as a presentation of the city of Trondheim. The Local Organizing Committee (LOC) was successful in their bid, and the dates were set for our workshop.

I was recruited to lead the International Programme Committee (IPC) in March of 2021, and I immediately started to put together the IPC team. I was given a free rein, and I was able to secure a wonderful group of people to participate in the IPC. I am very grateful to them all for their input and time, and for sharing their considerable EAHIL experience with me.

#### The theme

The theme of our workshop was “Radical positive change agents”, a title inspired by the quote by R. David Lankes: “To be a librarian is not to be neutral, or passive, or waiting for a question. It is to be a radical positive change agent within your community”.

The IPC found the quote above an inspiration and a way of broadly approaching changing roles, new dynamics, power relations in academia, sustainable practice, visibility and impact of libraries and new ways of making valuable contributions to knowledge creation, learning and teaching. The six subthemes of the workshop were meant to reflect some of these issues. Most libraries are facing a continual lack of resources, and in such situations, it is easy to get a little short-sighted. It is easy to get stuck in the details and the everyday operations, and to forget to look at the big picture. How can we be the change we want to see in our libraries? Is it possible to come together for more sustainable development practices? How can we be more visible and have more impact? How can we be more inclusive and diverse? We wanted to use our workshop to take a step back and try to get a glimpse of the big picture.

#### The keynotes

We were able to secure three keynote speakers to address the theme from their various viewpoints. The first keynote speaker was none other than R. David Lankes himself, joining us on the screen from the US. His keynote was concerned with the libraries’ roles in a polarized society. Lankes talked about censorship and the difficult position that librarians find themselves in. He amended his original quote with this: “To be a radical positive agent is to fight for your whole community, your values, and for democracy itself”.

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Our second keynote was Mia Høj Mathiasson. Her topic was the library as a proactive agent in sustainability practices. She talked specifically about her research in the UPSCALE project and work with the Ballerup public library. Sustainability work is a process rather than a goal, Mathiasson said.

Our third keynote was from the Norwegian National librarian, Aslak Sira Myhre. Myhre talked about the National Library's role in digitalization processes and making the national heritage digital. The National library team learned, however, that providing access does not mean that people use the information, and that information is not the same as knowledge. Digitalization has not been a problem for the library, but it challenged the role of the librarian, Myhre said. We should be agents for free access to information, but also agents against piracy, he concluded.

The three keynote speakers approached the new roles of libraries and librarians in different ways and from their various viewpoints. Personally, I liked that we heard the stories from different sectors. The speakers included examples from school libraries and public libraries as well as from academic and health libraries. It is important to include them all if we are to see the big picture of our present and future. As several of the keynote speakers mentioned: collaboration is important.

### Workshops, oral presentations, teachmeets and CECs

The IPC were very happy with the number of submissions we received. When the extended deadline was met, we had received 80 submissions. There were more oral presentation submissions, and fewer workshop submissions than expected, but we were excited to see that many had embraced the teachmeet format. After review, we were left with 63 accepted submissions. A couple of authors had to withdraw at a later stage due to unforeseen circumstances, but all in all, we ended up with 6 CECs, 17 workshops, 27 oral presentations and 10 teachmeets. We had eliminated poster presentations from our event, and we opened for teachmeets instead. The evaluations we have received indicate that people found the teachmeets useful and entertaining.

### The social events

In all, 250 people attended EAHIL 2023, and we had a record number of first-timers this year. The first-timers were invited to attend a separate event on Tuesday, 13 June. They met at the Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts, where they were treated to a bit of food, and some entertainment to get to know each other. On Wednesday, everyone was invited to an Organ recital at Nidaros Cathedral, Norway's only medieval cathedral. One of our own delegates, Wichor Bramer, even contributed with a piece before the recital began. After the recital, there was a reception at the Archbishop's palace with food, drink and a short talk on the restoration work of the cathedral. Our conference dinner was held at Scandic Nidelven hotel, and we were served lovely food before we were entertained by The Peer Reviews, who gave us three highly entertaining songs on the life in academia. The delegates also proved that they could sing when they sang the birthday song for me. Thank you all again for that! I had a lovely birthday celebration with you!



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### Things we have learned

Never underestimate the EAHIL gang's wish to dance! We missed the mark there. We had to be out of the event room at midnight, and we hadn't reserved a dancing space. Sorry, guys! If we ever host the EAHIL again, we will make sure to have a fabulous space for dancing after dinner.

Workshops fill up fast. Some authors were generous enough to give their workshop twice, and therefore, we were able to get more people in to good workshops. Some people were asking why we didn't have more workshops. The answer was that we didn't get more submissions in that category. We also chose quality over quantity, so we had not made the programme first and then filled it up. We made the programme after we had done the review. We figured that the quality was more important than filling a pre-set set of slots.

The "hygge corner" with knitting needles, yarn and books was appreciated, and so was our gaming room where people competed in Mario Kart, Mario Party, Tennis, Just dance and more. Being at a conference is hard work, and sometimes people need a little break to process information.

The LOC is an important key to success. We had a wonderful team that took care of everything from room bookings to social events planning, catering, website, social media, sponsor contacts, rigging and technical support. Our lovely conference managers, Tiffany and Monica at NTNU Videre, made a huge effort to make our event professional. Thank you again to all our sponsors, who made such a good contribution to the workshop!

Hosting an EAHIL event is a lot of work, but so much fun, too! We highly recommend taking on an event if you have staff to deal with it. The EAHIL community is so generous, friendly, fun-loving and engaged, and people were happy to be together and to learn from each other.

Thank you all so much for attending our EAHIL 2023 Workshop in Trondheim! We hope to see you again in Riga next year.