



Sin Joan Yee  
University Librarian  
Tel.: (679) 32 32282  
Fax: (679) 323 1528  
Email: Sin.Yee@usp.ac.fj

❖ The University of the South Pacific  
Private Bag, Laucala Campus  
Suva, Fiji  
Ph: (679) 3232050  
Fax: (679) 3231528  
<http://www.usp.ac.fj/library>

**ASIA PACIFIC INFORMATION NETWORK (APIN)  
THIRD MEETING, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MALAYSIA, KUALA LUMPUR  
26-28 FEBRUARY 2007**

I participated in the 3rd Asia Pacific Information Network (APIN) meeting held in Kuala Lumpur from 26-28 February 2007. The meeting was co-organized by the National Library of Malaysia and Unesco, Bangkok. I am grateful to Unesco Bangkok for inviting me, the Unesco Office for the Pacific States for funding my participation, and the University of the South Pacific for granting special leave. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Secretariat for the wonderful support and for looking after us so well (especially to the person who found the cover of my USB drive and left it at my table overnight).

#### **WELCOME**

The Director General of the National Library of Malaysia, Mrs Siti Zakiah binti Aman, unofficially welcomed the participants and Dr. Susanne Ornager (Unesco Bangkok) gave a debriefing session before elections of officials took place. Mrs. Siti Zakiah binti Aman was elected Chair, and Mr Dasarath Thapa (Nepal) and Mr. Nanag Wijanarko (Indonesia) Co-Chairpersons. Mr. Steven Lulich (New Zealand), Mrs Sunethra Perera (Sri Lanka) and I were elected rapporteurs.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

Participants came from Bhutan, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Peoples' Republic of China, Republic of Korea, Republic of the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia. They were professionals in the field of information and communications (e.g. ICT Specialists, Librarians, etc.). In addition, there were about 30 local observers from the government ICT sectors.

#### **COUNTRY REPORTS**

We launched straight into the presentation of country papers after the unofficial opening. The papers reflected the diversity of backgrounds of the participants – some were more technology oriented whilst others were more focused on “information” issues. My paper gave a South Pacific wide focus, highlighting the improvements made with regard to technological infrastructure and services but the lack of attention to library/content issues. I found that this was also true of many of the other countries represented and the need for more local content emerged as a major recommendation of the meeting.

#### **OFFICIAL OPENING**

The Official Opening by Y. Bhg. Dato' Zakiah Ahmad, Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia (under which the National Library of Malaysia comes) took place, on the evening of the first day, at the Seri Pacific Ballroom, The Seri Pacific Hotel, Jalan Putra. We enjoyed a delicious

Chinese banquet whilst being treated to an extended programme of cultural performances throughout the evening. Malaysia is celebrating 50 years of nationhood in 2007, and there is a strong focus on Malaysia's rich cultural traditions.

## **UNESCO MEDIUM TERM STRATEGY**

On the second day, Dr. Ornager presented the Unesco Medium Term Strategy. I was heartened to hear that the Small Island Developing States have already been identified as a target group as many Pacific Islands will be covered. Dr. Ornager noted that there was still time to lobby for changes and this was kept in mind throughout the meeting.

## **APIN CONSTITUTION**

Dr. Susanne Ornager tabled the APIN Constitution for discussions and amendments. There were recommendations for stronger emphasis on local content development, the need to address issues of privacy and cybercrime, the inclusion of the Millenium Development Goals and the issue of training/education. As there was insufficient time to address the issues raised, it was agreed that a small group be formed to review and revise the Constitution.

## **PANEL DISCUSSIONS**

I participated in the panel on the Establishment of National IFAP (Information for All Programme) Committees, outlining efforts that had been made in the Pacific, in particular the establishment of the Pacific IFAP Committee by expanding the terms of reference of the NZ IFAP Committee, and the National Symposium sponsored by Pacific Unesco in collaboration with the Fiji Library Association and the USP Library. The delegates from China, Korea and Iran also outlined their experiences in setting up IFAP committees in their countries. Korea indicated its interest in providing assistance to other countries.

The Panel on Human Resources Development included the delegate from India, the Philippines and New Zealand. All these countries had programmes in place with regard to human resources training at different levels, ranging from community education to higher education. It was agreed that information literacy skills were essential for the creation of the knowledge society that we all aspire towards. The Philippines model in developing local digital content for telecentres may be useful for the countries of the region.

The Panel on National Information Policies took place on the last day, with the delegates from Mongolia and Sri Lanka speaking on their experiences. I raised the issue that "libraries" were absent from both policies. Steven Lulich from NZ elaborated on the important role that the NZ National Library had played in the drafting of NZ's National Information Policy and the NZ Digital Strategy which followed. The meeting agreed that the library component should be spelt in all National Information Policies. The need for South-South collaboration was emphasised, resulting in the suggestion for the promulgation of a set of standards for National Information Policies.

The Panel on Content Development and Knowledge Management also took place on the last day with the delegates from Vietnam and Malaysia speaking on their experiences. Both countries have put in place impressive content development programmes and recognise that content development is a very important for the development of a knowledge society. Vietnam is very aware of the need to develop local content in local languages, and has done a lot of work in translating library tools (e.g. MARC21, DDC, AACR2) to assist in organising content. Malaysia has many programmes in place to foster the development of high value-added content. These include the establishment of the MSC in 1996, e-learning initiatives, nationwide support for the important role of libraries in human capital development and lifelong learning, the development of library digitization projects (especially the Perdana (National) Digital Library), the development of content-rich websites, the development of telecentres, etc.

## **ROISAP**

Dr. Petrina Faustine of Widyatama University spoke on ROISAP (Regional Observatory of the Information Society in Asia Pacific) which has been in existence now for several years. APIN NU's (National Units) had agreed to contribute to the Observatory but so far, very little has been contributed. Technical difficulties were raised by some members and it was agreed that members will send links to ROISAP.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### Human Resources:

- A "South-South Cooperation" recommendation on a Malaysian survey on information literacy for the region for different groups i.e. high school, graduate and under graduate students etc...
- A "South-South Cooperation" recommendation for Korean assistance with digital literacy training in the region
- Recommendation for programmes to train the trainers of information literacy

### ICT best practice and joint research:

- Recommendation for UNESCO to investigate a common set of ICT indicators for making regional comparisons within the APIN region.
- Recommendation for UNESCO to fund and undertake a joint research project for ICT impact in the APIN region.
- Recommendation for better use of ROISAP as a portal for ICT research by APIN country members
- Recommendation that UNESCO produce a set of standards for APIN countries to help them develop and revise their national information policies that take an holistic approach

### Content creation:

- Recommendation that "IFAP National Committees" focus on local content initiatives, that they will form virtual/face to face subcommittees to assist them
- Recommendation for a regional exchange of information on the use of telecentres in the APIN region for the purposes of the dissemination and creation of local content i.e. in the areas of health, agriculture, business enterprises, rural development etc..
- Recommendation that workshops on local content development be organised through "South-South Cooperation" for APIN member countries.
- Recommendation that APIN in collaboration with UNESCO Pacific and UNESCO NZ host a sub-regional workshop on identifying opportunities for digital content creation and digitisation for the Pacific region

## **4<sup>TH</sup> APIN MEETING**

Two nominations were received from the floor (Dr Petrina Faustine for the location of Bandung, Indonesia and Mr Dao Manh Trang for the location of Hanoi). A secret ballot was taken and Vietnam won (10-8).

## **VISITS & SOCIALS**

After lunch on Tuesday 27 February, we visited the Village Library at Sepang, about an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur. The Library serves a community of around 3000 "aboriginal" people. Traditional library services as well as online services are provided. We also had a tour of Putrajaya, a federal government administration centre of Malaysia. It was founded in 1995 and is still being developed. It is located in the MSC (Multimedia Super Corridor) and is near to Cyberjaya (Cybercity). The buildings and infrastructure are very impressive.

In the evening, the Secretary General of the Malaysian National Commission for Unesco, Mr. Kenneth J. Luis, hosted us to a dinner at Seri Angkasa Revolving Restaurant, Kuala Lumpur Tower. The food was

fantastic as was the view of Kuala Lumpur, especially the stunning view of the Petronas Twin Towers by night.

On Wednesday 28 February, we had an evening tour of Kuala Lumpur, stopping off at the Handicraft Market and Chinatown, for shopping. Our tour guide for all these tours was an amazing source of knowledge on Malaysia and its peoples.

A visit to the National Library of Malaysia was scheduled at our request on Thursday 29 February. Many participants had left by then so only four of us were able to take advantage of this. I was very impressed with the physical facilities, collections and services offered. The Library staff were very professional in their approach. We received more gifts and ended with a lunch with some of the staff.

## **CLOSING**

Mr. Sunder Singh (India) gave the vote of thanks on behalf of the participants. Dr. Ornager also thanked everyone as did the Chairperson, Mrs. Siti Zakiah binti Aman. The hosts presented all of us with two group photos (one of which was beautifully framed) and a stationary box made of Malaysian wood. We were also given CDs of the papers and power-point presentations.

## **CONCLUSION**

I was very happy to renew friendships and make new friends at the 3<sup>rd</sup> APIN meeting. As usual, there was much to learn as developments in the information and communications sectors in many (not all) countries in Asia are burgeoning. The Pacific has a long way to go in comparison. It was also a good opportunity to build partnerships and see how we can cooperate with each other.

I wish to highlight the recommendation that “APIN in collaboration with UNESCO Pacific and UNESCO NZ host a sub-regional workshop on identifying opportunities for digital content creation and digitisation for the Pacific region”.

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