

Ella Burrows, Senior Library Assistant at the LSE, reviews her first UKSG conference

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Ella Burrows
Senior Library Assistant
London School of Economics and Political Science

Attending my first **UKSG** conference was a truly great experience. It wasn't just my first time at UKSG, but also my first conference altogether, and I must admit the prospect of networking with some very impressive librarians and publishers made me quite nervous.

I am happy to report that my fears were unfounded. As soon as I got to the first timer's reception on Wednesday evening, I spotted another award winner, so introduced myself and got chatting. It turns out, although most librarians at the event claimed to be bad at networking, they were all pretty great at it. Everyone was down to earth and made me feel at ease – so much so that I was quite surprised when later in the conference I saw them introducing talks and realised they were all high-profile people in the library world! They gave some great advice about making the most of the conference events and social activities, but also taking breaks when you needed to. Overall, it was a great start to my conference experience.

After the introduction to the conference from **Joanna Ball** on 'wicked problems' on Thursday morning, we dove straight in to the first plenary. All three speakers were fantastic, but a particular highlight for me was **Adetoun Adebisi Oyelude** speaking on 'Indigenous Knowledge Preservation as a sign of respect for culture: Concerns of libraries, archives and museums'. This was an area I was unfamiliar with and was one example of the many new topics I learnt about at the conference – as a relative newcomer to the world of Scholarly Communications, I still have a lot to learn. The idea of 'sacred knowledge' held by communities, which it would be disrespectful to make open to all, was interesting considering how many of the other conference sessions discussed open access as the inevitable future. It was a timely reminder of the importance of including a diversity of perspectives when considering open access questions, as

cultural specificities will affect how knowledge can be shared respectfully and with the consent of the communities to whom it belongs.

Text and Data Mining is an issue which is growing in importance in our library as we start to receive more questions from students about our services. ‘A TDM journey: understanding user needs and developing library support’ was the perfect case study of how to grow your TDM provision in a sustainable way while working with all the departments of the university who have a role to play. The librarians had some useful tips as to what they had learnt along the way – it was empowering to hear them emphasising our rights to TDM under UK law, and how to upskill librarians so they can be more confident using TDM tools and meeting student needs. It has inspired me to sign up to a coding course and gave me some great examples and tools to take back to my team.

It was great to hear from the speakers in plenary two. Particularly challenging were reflections from **Kalwant Bhopal** on BME experiences in education, and the research indicating we have not, in fact, made huge progress, with attainment gaps and staffing inequality still an ever-present issue in Higher Education. She noted that the lack of meaningful change is an ongoing problem, caused in part by the fact that policymaking is only possible when white people do not feel threatened. I particularly liked the suggestion of tying data on HE institutions inequalities to funding, since this provides a real consequence for universities which fail to create change.

I also attended two great breakout sessions on COUNTER statistics from **Laura Wong** and **Tasha Mellins-Cohen**. They demonstrated the ways COUNTER was responding to library needs as we move increasingly towards open access and consider what ‘good value’ means in this landscape. We do not currently track OA usage statistics in the subscriptions team at LSE, but hearing that COUNTER 5.1 will move to focus more on global statistics does raise the question of whether we should be. Additionally, the second COUNTER session from Tasha Mellins-Cohen has firmly convinced me to stop using standard views, which I am sure she would be pleased to hear!

The fourth plenary, ‘Tackling the fault lines in our sector’ raised some interesting questions for me. It was a return to the theme of collaboration amongst all stakeholders in the sector, in this case to be sure that they do not become irrelevant players. There was also an argument made that the increase in open access research is what has caused the growth of anti-science movements and misinformation in the US, which gave me pause. I would have thought that increasing the availability of open access research was a way to help combat the spread of misinformation, so this was an interesting perspective.

I moved straight from this to the #dataSOS session. The realisation that publishers are potentially gathering huge amounts of library users’ data when they access online resources, over which we have no control, was certainly thought provoking. **Caroline Ball** and **Anthony Sinnott** proposed one alternative of a data neutral system – where libraries would not allow publishers to collect any data on users initially, with the potential for data to be collected later if there was a good reason for it. They also touched on educational technology and the potential user surveillance that could be being used to create these tools. It contrasted with one of the second lightning talks, where **Laura Pacey** proposed that educational technology and student tracking could be a way to diversify digital publishing. If, as Ball and Sinnott proposed, many library users are unaware of how much data is collected about them, they may be equally

unaware of how developments in educational technology may be using user data to construct these inclusive digital solutions.

In fact, this talk raised questions about the surveillance that could be involved in another of the sessions – ‘The read & publish user journey: delivering a unified reader & author experience’. Although providing a single platform for authors to use to both read and publish seems like a way to simplify the user experience, the #dataSOS presentation made me consider how and what data might be gathered for this. For example, what data they would use to create functions such as an article being suggested to a user based on their previous publishing history.

I also thoroughly enjoyed the social events throughout the conference. During the quiz, I made good use of my somewhat rusty knowledge of Central and South America, and our team ended up winning, which resulted in us receiving some Scotland-themed prizes I will treasure. The Gala Reception was exceptional – when else would you get exclusive access to wander round the **Kelvingrove Museum!**

The conference gave me a lot to consider, from the questions around publisher data gathering and practical COUNTER and TDM knowledge, to ethical and cultural considerations around indigenous knowledge preservation and the future of the Scholarly Communications sector. It also equipped me with some valuable advice around networking at the conference – in hindsight I should not have scheduled a meeting with a publisher for every single refreshment and lunch break bar one, and there was no need for me to be nervous about meeting new people. And, thanks to the final session ‘Shift Happens’, despite the coming challenges in the sector, I went home feeling positive and hopeful about the future, and life in general! I am very grateful to UKSG for giving me the opportunity to attend the conference, and I look forward to seeing familiar faces and more thought-provoking discussions at future UKSG events.

These views are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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