

Community Resilience Through Diversity

Crystal Fulton

Panel Moderator / EC Chair & EC Board, University College Dublin iSchool, Ireland
crystal.fulton@ucd.ie

Isto Huvila

Department of ALM, Uppsala University, Sweden
isto.huvila@abm.uu.se

Olivia Manuela Marques Pestana

University of Porto, Portugal
opestana@letras.up.pt

Anna Maria Tammaro

University of Parma, Italy
annamaria.tammaro@unipr.it

Ying-Hsang Liu

Department of Archivistics, Library and Information Science, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
ying-hsang.liu@oslomet.no

Sümeyye Akça

Department of Information and Records Management, Marmara University, Göztepe/İstanbul, Turkey
sumeyye.akca@marmara.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a pivot in people's practice of their daily life and work, in particular a pivot towards virtual living and working. Sponsored by the ASIS&T European Chapter, this panel discusses the diverse ways in which this has affected different communities within Europe, bearing in mind the varying languages, economic and political situations, and library and information structures within different European countries. Following on from presentations giving diverse perspectives from five European countries, we will ask session participants to reflect on the impact of the pivot on living and working in their own context, their coping mechanisms, and likely impact on the future.

KEYWORDS

Community; Diversity; Europe; Pivot; Resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Eric Ries (2011, 2012), who coined the term “pivot,” observed that highly successful businesses experienced dramatic, abrupt change or a pivot before they boomed, citing for example, Twitter, YouTube, and Groupon. During the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically disrupted our everyday lives, affecting our families and colleagues, our social participation, and our workplaces, bringing about “pivot” in how we approach our everyday lives and work. In short, the worlds we knew were turned upside down. While some were furloughed, others of us were able to continue working, “pivoting” to teaching online, meeting online, and conducting research online – to enable short-term survival for long term continuance, growth, and resilience. The possibility of vaccination has changed our view for the future, though vaccination roll out has been mixed in different regions and has created divisions among people.

Throughout this tumultuous period, our library and information science community has persevered. The European community is a diverse association of nations, cultures, languages, and people, and the geographical entity of Europe extends still further. It is this diversity, between the many cultures and languages of Europe that we will leverage in this panel to highlight the challenges and approaches in different European countries. Ongoing findings from the European Social Survey (European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC), 2021) identify differences between countries in attitudes to justice, health and values, for example. Information is emerging on how a variety of factors affect the response of libraries and information centres. Rundqvist (2021), reviewing the response of Swedish public libraries, notes the contextual nature of the response, affected by the epidemiology of the disease in Sweden, Sweden's political strategy as regards lockdown, and learning acquired as the pandemic proceeded.

Mercurio (2021) identifies the importance of existing organisational cultures and priorities, contrasting the greater readiness of Italian municipal libraries to cope with remote working and service, compared with Italian state libraries with their “fixed 19th-century vision of the function of the public library”. Tammaro (2020) has also identified organisational and cultural issues impacting Italian libraries' response to the pandemic. Social and economic factors within countries also affected users of libraries, for example in Jaeger & Blaabaek's (2020) study of inequalities in library use during COVID-19. The pivot has also obviously affected Library and Information Science educators, providing both challenges and opportunities (e.g., Ocholla, 2021), and more generally brought issues of open access, electronic delivery and workforce skills into sharp focus (e.g., Research Libraries UK, 2020).

What are the strengths of communities that have supported resilience among our teaching and research activities? How has diversity facilitated resilience? As vaccination progresses, how will we realign our work together for a stronger future? What do we need to do in the short term and in the long term to sustain these goals?

PANEL STRUCTURE AND PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

This panel offers a space to pause and consider the past year and how diversity has supported our community resilience. The first part of the session will consist of presentations from speakers from five countries (covering both Northern and Southern Europe), addressing different aspects of our theme (approximately 50 minutes). The remainder of the session will involve online interaction with participants, to surface their own experience and views.

This panel session will challenge participants to consider:

- a) What helps them not only survive, but potentially flourish in their academic and professional activities, despite the extreme changes in our life circumstances brought about by COVID-19; and
- b) What realignment will mean for our European community.

Collection of membership stories of resilience

In advance of the panel session at ASIS&T's Annual Meeting, we will invite ASIS&T members in Europe, including academics and professionals, to post their experiences of coping with the pandemic in their libraries, universities, research, and teaching, noting in particular, creative community solutions and resilience in the face of this worldwide calamity. A Google Jamboard will capture this content for discussion at the panel session, available at: https://jamboard.google.com/d/1RCQgS4_PCbWi1ByJ2BaPJKymvTXUMLeKh48kf_g1k/edit?usp=sharing

Key questions for participant discussion will be:

- a) What has been your experience of the pivot as we reframed how we do things?
- b) What have been your coping mechanisms as we repositioned ourselves to manage through the pandemic?
- c) What do you believe the future will look like, as we realign our lives post pandemic?

PANEL SPEAKERS

The panel discussion will include 4 speakers representing diverse areas, including professional work and academia, different linguistic-cultural backgrounds, and different European countries.

Isto Huvila, Department of ALM, Uppsala University, Sweden

Communities, diversity, and resilience in Nordic library, archive and museum context

Huvila's presentation provides a glimpse to developments and debates in Nordic libraries, museums, and archives (LAMs) relating to community support, diversity and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples provide evidence of how the pandemic unfolds as a challenge but also as an imperative, opportunity, and impetus for pursuing new means for supporting communities, their diversity and resilience. Comparisons between the Nordic countries and their strategies and policies relating to LAMs provide further interesting insights into their societal role in a crisis situation.

Olivia Manuela Marques Pestana, University of Porto, Portugal

One step back, two steps forward: How the Portuguese IS academic environment coped with the pandemic

This presentation will focus on the strategies followed by Portuguese Information Science programmes to face the challenges that arose due to the pandemic. Built on the conclusions of the interviews conducted with the programmes' directors, several aspects are highlighted: the new online environment is the present and not the future; blended learning is the best choice; flipped classes, mainly the theoretical, are welcomed by students.

Anna Maria Tammaro, University of Parma, Italy

What the new normal looks like in Italian libraries

Anna Maria investigates leaders and librarians, how they are preparing the new normal, different visions, new and old issues. Tammaro (2020) described an investigation into the impact of COVID-19 on libraries in Italy.

Ying-Hsang Liu, Department of Archivistics, Library and Information Science, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Stay safe and stay relevant: Danish library initiatives during the COVID-19 lockdown

Ying-Hsang will discuss how Danish libraries have responded to the crisis using a coordinated approach. Specifically, following the government guidelines for lockdown and reopening, libraries have stayed relevant to the community with virtual and intermediary information services. within the constraints of the lockdown.

Sümeyye Akça, Department of Information and Records Management, Marmara University, Göztepe/Ankaraİstanbul, Turkey

University libraries in Turkey: During and after quarantine

Sümeyye will discuss the impact of COVID-19 on academic libraries in Turkey, and how this community has transformed services to support its members. The conclusion of the interviews with managers of libraries about the impact of this new situation will be presented in detail.

University libraries can meet most of their users' information needs in electronic environment, but they should increase their efforts, in order to adapt for different unusual scenarios.

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