

**DATA OR INFORMATION:  
THE FADING BOUNDARIES**  
**Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Conference of the  
International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science  
Libraries and Information Centers**

Editors:

James W. Markham  
and  
Andrea L. Duda



23rd Annual Conference of IAMS LIC held 5-9 October, 1997  
at Charleston, South Carolina, U.S.A.

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1998

International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science  
Libraries and Information Centers  
Conference Series

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## **DATA OR INFORMATION: THE FADING BOUNDARIES**

### **Introduction**

Allow me to take a few minutes of your time to reflect together on this year's IAMSLIC Annual Conference (the 23rd already!) in Charleston, SC. If you were there then you know what a grand time we all had and this letter's purpose is to refresh your memory and an invitation to make 1998 an eventful year for our IAMSLIC. If you weren't then may my short resume shed some light on what transpired between 5 and 9 October 1997.

Peter

#### **THEME 1: IAMSLIC/IOC META DATA CONFERENCE**

The purpose of this day was for us all to look beyond our own yard. What is the job of a librarian? It is certainly more than lending out books. It's about shelving books in an organized manner so users can easily find the one they need amongst the thousands in your library, so it's about sorting, managing information sources; it's about handling information about information. This is the definition of metadata: information about data (including information).

Several papers were presented related to metadata which demonstrated the extensive work carried out around the world identifying standards for metadata. The papers showed different approaches: Australia has gone for a pragmatic approach identifying a standard (the so-called Blue Pages) by exposing the draft systems to the user community i.e. the scientists, with the view of developing a standard which would be appreciated by both the input (i.e. the scientists) and processing/output (the data managers) community. As such a workable compromise had been found between the scientist who doesn't want to spend too much time filling fields, and the data managers who want to get the highest resolution possible. The United States' FGDC has chosen for a high resolution system allowing for a wide spectrum of data types, resulting in quite a hefty field structure. We also heard of the IODE's MEDI Pilot Project which would not so much create a 'universal' standard but which would rather allow 'mapping' of the fields of the different existing formats.

With the rapid development of the World Wide Web on the Internet as an information source several papers highlighted some important issues related to the 'vaporware' nature of information on the Internet: increasingly we see that information is 'published' on the Internet only. The real-time nature of information dissemination through the Internet has obvious advantages, but what about when you are writing a paper and, being a conscientious scientist, you add a WWW reference to your bibliography? Too often we find that a page on the WWW has disappeared or changed. Could this result in refusal by a journal of your paper (because your bibliography could not be verified)? How about archiving of web pages and web servers? Who is responsible? Is it the server host or should it be a national archive? A lot of discussion ensued during the Conference on this matter. Not surprisingly there were different opinions but no ready solutions. Homework!!

Another exciting issue raised was HTML meta tags. Indeed, we had been talking about metadata about numerical data but what about this new data type, the html page? We have all suffered the '1,000,000 hit' syndrome caused by searching for a term using popular search engines. Obviously in order to enable us to find relevant information amongst the hundreds of millions of html pages we need a more structured approach to web searching. We were informed about several initiatives (Warwick framework, Dublin Core, GILS) related to identifying a metadata (meta tags) structure for web pages. Basically these add to each html a number of fields such as title, author, date of creation, keywords, description, etc. which will enable a more directed search approach: the author will identify keywords which best describe the content of that page, thereby giving added weight to these words. If you search the web for these words and in the keyword field you will end up with far better results than with the current search which results in all pages in which a particular word occurs. Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? So why isn't it a reality yet? The answer is: we don't have a standard yet and even if we decide on a standard the search engines won't modify their systems because there are not enough pages out there using the standard. A typical chicken and egg problem. I believe IAMSLIC can play an important role in getting the ball rolling. I intend to maintain contact with the Dublin Core group (see further) so we can agree on a structure. As a next step I suggest we all try to implement the Dublin Core structure in our web pages and also try to convince as many other web weavers as possible to do the same. Only then can we make it clear to the search engines that DC compliant search facilities should be part of their system. Homework!!

I believe it is fair to say that this day was successful. Despite the fact that metadata could have been considered a bit 'far from my bed' it became clear that we, as information managers, have a crucial role to play in these matters. The active discussions were proof that the issues are considered important by the IAMSLIC community. I am looking forward to working with all members on resolving some of the issues mentioned above.

## **THEME 2: INTERNET TOOLS**

With the Internet we have seen a shift from a paper based (and centralized) information system towards an electronic system whereby the users increasingly access information resources from 'their comfortable armchair'. Several papers described new tools and products born out of the Internet revolution. We heard about CSA's ASFA on-line service (IDS), and Elsevier's Science Direct. Trying to deal with the unwieldy search engine we also heard about some new finding aids such as the 'Database Advisor' and others. A lot of discussion ensued about the trend towards paperless libraries. Is this the end of the scientists browsing through the library holdings? Are we going towards a scientist sitting in his/her "comfortable armchair" holding a calculator and a budget sheet in one hand, and an egg timer in the other, now that each second of on-line reading or searching has to be paid for? Of course this is a cartoon and electronic information

access, including electronic journals, provides you with a number of incredibly powerful tools helping you to locate what you need quickly. Furthermore, as we have heard during past conferences, the number of pages published each year increases tremendously to the point that libraries can no longer maintain paper copies.

### **THEME 3: NEW LIBRARY TECHNIQUES**

The papers presented under this theme displayed a great variety which clearly showed the variety of issues today's librarian has to deal with. They revealed the problems resulting from the rapid aging of computer technology: how to read yesterday's bar codes with today's off-the-shelf low-cost equipment? We were told that the solution can be far from low-cost! Is a librarian supposed to be knowledgeable about taxonomic nomenclature? Yes, when you're told to build a biological information database of bibliographic citations.

Which journals should you subscribe to? You can't subscribe to all so you need to make a choice: a top-10. But what if your users change subject area? How quickly can you adapt your subscription list? Multiple-year contracts with publishers can be a problem.

### **THEME 4: FARAWAY DESTINATIONS**

Jane Barnwell presented us some images to dream away to the far away Palau, and Sarah Heath told us about her trip to Ecuador where she advised on the overhaul of a library.

### **THEME 5: TRAINING TOMORROW'S (AND TODAY'S) LIBRARIANS**

Every IAMSLIC Conference shows that we need to keep on training ourselves if we want to keep abreast with the new techniques and technologies. But how and where to train? Beth gave us a highly entertaining insight in distant education programs. Finding a practical and accredited course is apparently not so easy!

What will the role of tomorrow's librarian? Will we still be guides to information or just system managers? Should we try to shape the role of tomorrow's librarian or should we let others define it for us?

Thursday afternoon was reserved for a GIS/ArcView Training Course, courtesy of the NOAA Coastal Services Center. I, and I think I speak for all the participants, had a great time and learned a lot in just a few hours. Mike Rink, the trainer, did a great job and we all managed to print our maps at the end of the day.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

I like to think that this IAMSLIC Conference presented a preview of future sessions whereby we increasingly add a training component integrated within the Conference. Myself I was quite impressed with the sustained high attendance of all Sessions. I would

have liked to have more 'outsiders' during the metadata workshop. However, it turned out that October was the metadata season with conferences on related topics in Dublin, Helsinki and Greece. Nevertheless I think some important and interesting issues came up during this Session in which the IAMSILIC community can play a role: metadata management, web page archival, and meta tags in web pages. I would also like to invite the membership to continue playing an active role in the development and maintenance of the IDALIC (IAMSILIC International Directory of Aquatic Libraries and Information Centres) and GLODIR (Global Directory of Marine (and Freshwater) Scientists. It is my hope that we will be able to expand the IDALIC directory to become a comprehensive worldwide directory in 1998.

Finally I wish to thank Helen, Jill and many others for their hard work with the local arrangements. Everything ran smoothly which may have made it look so easy! Those of us who have organized a conference of this size know better. The many samplings of local cuisine have expanded my body volume considerably but I have fond memories of Charleston with its horse carriages and rickshaws.

I won't say see you all next year as we will certainly talk through e-mail, phone or whatever other telecom device we can lay our hands on.

Peter Pissierssens  
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