By Araba Dawson-Andoh & Esmeralda Kale

The African Library Summit 2013 was hosted by the University of South Africa (UNISA) in Pretoria, South Africa July 2nd-5th. The theme was “African Librarianship - The Horizon and Beyond.” The aim was “to create an opportunity for established leaders to engage on significant issues in support of quality library and information services and librarianship on the African continent.” Seasoned library leaders convened to establish a framework for continued library development in Africa. Sponsors were UNISA, IFLA and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Approximately 250 delegates from thirty-three countries, including several African countries and the United States, assembled at the Senate Hall at the UNISA campus.

The sub-themes were leadership, innovation, cooperation and the way forward. Some of the significant areas identified and discussed under leadership were global leadership; developing multicultural leaders; African leadership systems; and African diaspora LIS leadership. Significant issues discussed under innovation, included sustainability and change; the knowledge society within the African context; and spaces. Areas of cooperation identified and discussed were preservation and access to cultural heritage; library associations, especially in Lusophone and Francophone Africa; education and training of professionals; and public and community information professionals. Each of these areas was introduced by several panelists at the morning and afternoon sessions. At the end of each panel, delegates split into smaller groups to drill down and discuss key issues raised by the panelists. Each drill down session had a facilitator and notes from each group were submitted to conference organizers.

Presentation highlights included; Dr. Andrew Kaniki, Executive for Knowledge Fields Development at the National Research Foundation, South Africa and John Tsebe, National Librarian and CEO: National Library in South Africa, who discussed leadership qualities. Dr. Chris Coward co-founder, Principal Research Scientist, and Director of the Technology & Social Change Group (TASCHA) at the University of Washington Information School gave a very interesting presentation on innovation (cont’ on page 3)
Wikipedia Growth and Africa: a report

Phoebe Ayers, science and engineering reference librarian at the University of California (Davis), spoke at Northwestern University Library on November 8 as part of the Northwestern Librarians Assembly speakers series. Her subject was “The Next Ten Years of Wikipedia.” She has been an active member of the Wikipedia editing community since 2003, is currently on the Board of Trustees of the Wikimedia Foundation, which runs Wikipedia and its sister projects, and is the co-author of How Wikipedia works: and how you can be a part of it.

Wikipedia is the fifth most used website in the world and the only nonprofit site in the top fifty—though run on a shoestring budget derived from public donations. It is, as Ayers put it, the largest publication in history by many orders of magnitude. And it is consulted, as well, by several orders of magnitude more than any other encyclopedia or reference work. That is one reason why, when Ayers comes across a particularly good publication on a topic, she cites it in relevant articles in Wikipedia, where it is more likely to be seen by more people, “so that good work doesn’t go to waste.”

Ayers commented that most people assume that Wikipedia operates independent of constraints, but that, in fact, it functions within a particular context that is determined by social, legal, and technical factors. She emphasized that Wikipedia “went dark” (January 18, 2012) in response to a particularly “pernicious” bill, the “Stop Online Piracy Act” (SOPA), of all Germanic-language articles. [The other African languages that Wikipedia has been created. There is also a page listing Wikipedias by language group, and the number of articles grows 40 percent in 2012, and non-English mobile usage grew by 66 percent. So while the number of active content producers for Wikipedia may be falling at the moment, the user pool is expanding exponentially.

Wikipedia Zero is now available in the following African countries: Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, DR Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, Niger, Tunisia, and Uganda. In some of these countries it is available in all languages, in others only in certain languages. Note that South Africa is not on this list. In a piece filmed by Wikipedia this past June, S. African high school students take turns reading from a letter they wrote to communication providers asking to have this free access, since 90 percent of them have cell phones but their school has no library.

The “List of Wikipedias” article in Wikimedia provides a list with statistics for all 287 languages for which Wikipedias have been created. There is also a page listing Wikipedias by language group, and the number of articles grows 40 percent in 2012, and non-English mobile usage grew by 66 percent. So while the number of active content producers for Wikipedia may be falling at the moment, the user pool is expanding exponentially.

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African-language articles in Wikipedia

- Semitic – 247,058 in Arabic; 11,040 in Egyptian Spoken Arabic; 264 in Tigrinya.
- Bantu – 25,572 in Swahili; 2,040 in Lingala; 1,818 in Kinyarwanda; 1,511 in Shona; 855 in Kongo; 16 other languages represented with lower article numbers, e.g. a mere 156 in Xhosa.
- Yoruba – 30,709 in Yoruba.
- Cushitic – 2,837 in Somali; 277 in Oromo; 6 in Afar.
- Atlantic – 1,190 in Wolof; 168 in Fulah.
- Berber – 1,524 in Kabyle.
- Igbo-oid – 754 in Igbo.
- Kwa – 305 in Ewe; 182 in Akan; 221 in Twi.
- Mandé – 397 in Bambara.
- Chadic – 293 in Hausa.
- Urhongan – 206 in Sango.
- Nilo-Saharan – 1 in Kanuri.

Subsequent to Ayers’ presentation I came across a description of WikiAfrica, “a collaborative and international project designed to africanize Wikipedia through networks, research, projects, publications, and events”, initiated by two arts-related non profits, Africacentre (based in Cape Town) and Lettera27 (in Milan). “The initial two years [of the project] are focused on encouraging external Africa-based, cultural organizations, museums and archives, as well as bloggers and journalists, to contribute their knowledge to Wikipedia.” The focus of their first phase is cultural – literature, poetry, art, cinema – though partnership with organizations having existing archives with content ready to be place online. As of November 2012 the milestone of 30,000 pictures, articles and other Africa-related new content was reached. Other goals of this initiative are to “activate new Wikipedia users and editors related to Africa” and to mentor these new Wikipedians.

(Thanks to Phoebe Ayers for her feedback on the content of this article.)

(Wikipedia (cont’ from page 2)
Some significant recent acquisitions from the Library of Congress Office, Nairobi

Compiled by Terry Ngatia and Pamela Howard-Reguindin

Ghana


Kenya


Honoring Hans Panofsky

Hans Panofsky, who died July 1, 2013, was the curator emeritus of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of Africana Studies at Northwestern University. Hans played a major role in the creation of CRL’s CAMP and in the ASA and ALC. In addition, Hans was very active of behalf of area studies in ALA, ACRL, and the ARL.

Hans was honored in a special tribute during the 2013 fall meeting of ALC. To view a video of David Easterbrook’s comments, click on the graphic to the right.