

The 9th International Toy Library Conference - Portugal

Lisbon, 13 – 17 May 2002

Main Theme: Playing is Growing



The official languages of the conference were Portuguese, English and French. Simultaneous interpreting was available at plenary meetings.

339 persons took part in the Conference of which 120 were international participants. 22 countries were represented with Brazil 31 persons; Spain 15; France 14; Great Britain 11; Switzerland 8 and South Africa 3.

The institutions represented were mainly toy libraries, 99 presentations were made of which 34 were international.

Portugal would like to mention that this meeting was very important for Portugal itself. Of course all the participants could profit from the exchange of experience between the different countries, but this enormous input of information and experience was a great source for the toy librarians working in Portugal as well.

The main aim of the conference was to reflect on the role of play in the history and life of mankind.

This Conference took place in the splendour of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. It was more academic and research based than many previous conferences with new contributors from South America.

Objectives

1. Promoting a better understanding of issues related to the role of play in socio-cultural, pedagogic and scientific contexts.

2. Providing a variety of approaches to the essential and spontaneous aspects of play and the features of spaces, times and aspects that influence playing.
3. Improving training for professionals who work in play libraries and similar areas, health education, cultural promotion, communication and social development through reflection and an exchange of ideas.
4. Looking for solutions linking tradition and modernity with a view to involving different generations and cultures.
5. Motivating participants to use educational and socio-cultural forms of intervention by maintaining, reviewing, promoting and creating areas and projects for playtime (toy libraries, play centres, play schools and crèches etc.)

Themes

1. Theoretical Aspects of Play

Under this theme, a number of theoretical aspects of play were discussed to examine the complexity of play in contemporary societies.

2. Toy Libraries and Play Areas : Based on Range of Experiences and Practices

This theme provided a background for comparing ideas and exchanging experiences among the participants. Contexts, countries, policies and different target communities have all contributed toward the design and entertainment of play areas being guided by a multiplicity of concepts and intervention modes, by different forms of public recognition and institutionalisation, as well as by the special way in which society and history evolve.

3. Past, Present and Future of the Toy Industry

Necessarily the toy industries catalyse and reflect changes in life styles and the demands of consumers in contemporary societies. This theme invites reflection on questions such as the design and production of play materials as well as the role of the new technologies in changing play areas and practices. (for example, Cyberculture.)

4. The Challenges of Educating Play Professionals

Specialisation and change in play practices mean rethinking models and content for training toy librarians in play centres and

those involved in facilitating play areas, as well as re-mapping new (and old) research areas. Training must be reshaped (initial, on-going and specialised) and research in this area was the main objective of this theme.

Programme

Lectures, debates, personal experiences, posters and workshops. Exhibitions, visits and events.

We enjoyed an animated evening, where students sang to us and each country had to perform, proving that the Brazilians and South Africans are the best dancers!

A post-conference excursion south of Lisbon to Montemor o Novo and Evora gave delegates the chance to see some delightfully different toy libraries and to enjoy one another's company and ideas away from the busy, rich conference programme.

For Memories of the 9th Conference, [click here](#) (the short report below)

Personal memories of the 9th International Toy Library Conference

By Inge Schmid, Council member of the Swiss Association of Toy Libraries – translated by Pat Atkinson

Having been actively involved in organizing our conference in Zurich, to be able to see another country organize one and join in varied workshops without the need to travel as far as Australia or Japan interested me. It is a daunting, difficult task to describe a conference with 83 sessions & workshops that filled 159 pages of abstracts.

267 people participated in the conference, 8 of them Swiss, and 7 from the Central Committee & Nancy Vagni from Geneva who speaks Portuguese & was our guide.

The inaugural speech by Dr Freda Kim on being "on line" or "off line" was full of humour.

Many sessions were in Portuguese but translated into excellent

French, some in French, others in English or with simultaneous English translation.

Unlike Zurich there was a plethora of professors and doctors, even Renate Fuchs was promoted to Doctor. There was little play practice but a great deal of theory about "ludicity" an academic term one would like to bring into everyday usage.

Members of ITLA presented their continent at a plenary session called "Toy Libraries of the World". Renate Fuchs spoke for Europe. "Toy Library Standards" was a presentation by the Swiss Association.

The coffee break on the first morning was enlivened in a very playful way by a nursery group playing circle games in the garden & on the last by school children singing.

The visits to the 2 toy libraries in Sintra impressed me. The first was in an immigrant neighbourhood, where the children cause difficulties because they don't know how to play. That day 56 children were there, registered only by their first names and date of birth. The second opened in September 2001 & was luxuriously equipped-see below.

Characteristics of Portuguese toy libraries-

- 1. they don't lend toys*
- 2. they are free to the children*
- 3. they act as leisure centres*
- 4. they offer manual activities to the children*
- 5. they are sources of anti-drug, Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases, and prevention of alcoholism information*
- 6. there is a family planning clinic with a nurse on Fridays from 11-1 and from 2-4 for 12 to 21 year olds where contraceptives & condoms are available*

Compared to us the toy libraries have few toys. In contrast they offer-

- 1. daily newspapers*
- 2. lots of books & comics*
- 3. lots of CDs of popular music, the children listen on headphones*
- 4. TVs, tapes and video cassettes*
- 5. computers*

Both toy libraries were in quite a large detached 2 storey

buildings with outdoor play space for football & other activities. The new one must have cost a great deal because it had a theatre for 80 people with a platform, a microscope room, and a room with 10 computers & internet access. A room for children with special needs had 2 wheelchairs and a tactile wall & a hoist. The staff is paid by the state and gets 2 days off a week. Public opening hours are from Tuesday afternoon to Saturday evening."

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE CONFERENCE (Links – only 1)

European Report