

# focus

## on International Library and Information Work

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# ILIG

International Library  
& Information Group



## Editorial

Thank you for downloading the latest issue of CILIP International Library and Information Group's *Focus* journal.

I'm very proud to present in this issue a couple of articles on the subject of book censorship, which is most certainly a pertinent international issue. Firstly the highly informative piece from Books Unbanned partners, attributed to both The Brooklyn Public Library and The Seattle

Public Library services. Not only do the authors provide an overview of the context of book banning in the USA, but they showcase in detail the programme Books Unbanned. This impactful initiative takes the supportive communities that these library services sit within and shares the access to diverse resources with residents in more restricted areas of the country, and you can read how this is achieved and the difference it has made within the article.

We also have a technical article from members of the *Every Book Its Reader* initiative, which seeks to improve the metadata available within WikiData for all books, and this article focuses on how banned books are dealt with as part of this work. The piece showcases the hard work completed to record details of

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editorial instances associated with specific works, and provides context that highlights the international co-operation from volunteers that has enabled this to be completed.

It's important for me to now announce that CILIP ILIG *Focus's* Associate Editor, Alice Taylor, has stepped down after many years of service and I'm really sorry to hear that our time working on this publication has only overlapped by one issue. Thank you for all the support Alice and all the work over the years, and you will be missed.

I can also confirm that the role will now kindly be filled by Ian Stringer, another long term member of the CILIP ILIG committee, and I look forward to working together going forwards. Thank you for all the support so far, Ian, and also the article contribution and photographs of the new library in Aalst.

We continue to welcome contributions at any time to this journal, in keeping with our scope of showcasing links to internationally based libraries, the excellent work completed within them and their innovations and developments. Please get in touch at the following address if you would like to submit your writing: [iligfocus@cilip.org.uk](mailto:iligfocus@cilip.org.uk)

Wherever you are reading from, I hope you enjoy reading the last issue of 2023.

**Joanne Fitzpatrick, Editor**

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Front cover image courtesy of NASA



# Banned Books and Wikidata

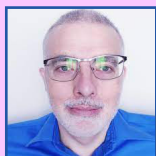
Núria Ferran-Ferrer, Miquel Centelles, Lluís Agustí  
Faculty of Information and Audiovisual Means at Universitat de Barcelona (UB)

Book banning has become a widespread method of global censorship. Governments are increasingly using this approach to control internet and technological resources. As is well known, censorship in libraries, and especially school and public libraries, is a subject of international and complex debate that touches several areas, from fundamental rights and freedom of expression to the social responsibility of public institutions and the professionals who work there, also the necessary representation of the existing diversity. Advocacy groups, like Amnesty International or library associations, have emerged to combat this threat to democracy, education, and progressive thinking.

Countries such as China, Bangladesh, and Egypt commonly ban books to limit education and suppress vulnerable populations<sup>1</sup>. In 2022, the American Library Association received a record-breaking 1,269 requests to restrict library access. This surge, nearly doubling the previous year's figures, underscores concern about intellectual freedom and diverse literary content. Within the 2,571 titles targeted for book censorship cases, some titles faced intense scrutiny<sup>2</sup>.



Nunia Ferran Ferrar



Miquel Centelles



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In April 2023, volunteers from Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Catalonia, and the United States launched the #EveryBookItsReader initiative<sup>3</sup>. Their goal was to improve content related to books, literary works, and oral traditions on various Wikimedia platforms, including Wikipedia, Wikidata, Wikicommons, Wikiquotes, Wikibooks, and Wikisource. This collaborative initiative, from various countries, recurs annually throughout April each year, aligning with World Book Day on April 23, which originated in Catalonia, Spain, as the “Day of Books and Roses.” Anyone, especially librarians, can participate.

The campaign was motivated by the high traffic on Wikipedia pages dedicated to books. For example, in the past 90 days on English Wikipedia, “Their Eyes Were Watching God” had 69,000 visitors. Besides, maintaining quality information about books on Wikipedia is crucial, because comprehensive information about books on Wikimedia benefits millions of individuals.

Wikipedia articles not only cover plots but also offer summaries of expert reviews, critiques, and public reception. They even compile accolades received by these literary works, benefiting authors, librarians, publishers, editors, translators, and booksellers. High-quality articles reduce the effort for readers and professionals to explore a book's

world. Librarians gain access to reviews without paywalls, independent booksellers easily find summaries, and publishers gain insights into global reception.

This year's Catalan campaign, #ACadaLectorElSeuLlibre (#EveryBookItsReader), was organized by the Faculty of Information and Audiovisual Communication<sup>4</sup> at the Universitat de Barcelona (UB) and by volunteers of BiblioWikis<sup>5</sup> and Viquidones<sup>6</sup> from Amical Wikimedia<sup>7</sup>. Two courses of the Digital Information Management Degree at UB were involved in the initiative: 'Collection Development' and 'Semantic Web'. Apart from these courses, the research project 'Women and Wikipedia'<sup>8</sup> supported them with the aim of looking at banned books for gender reasons. The initial intention was that the two areas would collaborate with each other.

The 'Semantic Web's students were required to provide lists of books based on Wikidata searches for banned books, but the difficulty was in locating which books were banned. 'Collection Development' provided almost thirty new articles about books to Wikipedia, in both Catalan and Spanish. These were assessed by a rubric for the quality of their content, especially focusing on:

- the description of the controversy,
- the accuracy of information by cross-checking with the referenced sources, and
- supporting the awareness and understanding of the students in these social and professional debates in order to enable them to become skilled future librarians.

## The problem of creating a list of banned books from Wikidata

To support the #EachBookItsReader campaign, the 'Semantic Web' course organised a learning activity focused on searching for and retrieving all literary works subjected to censorship and prohibition. Students were tasked with formulating SPARQL queries to achieve this objective using the Wikidata Query Service. However, it was realised that there was no consensus on how to describe literary works that have been censored, as there was a lack of ontology components in Wikidata that would enable the description of book bans and make it easier to retrieve such information through their search services. Identifying and providing examples of key elements of this, as well as the proposed solutions that have been suggested up to the present moment, lead to this being a feature of development discussions centred on the development of the WikiProject Books. This issue was present in two discussions: the first took place in December 2020<sup>9</sup>, while the second, which was much less extensive and controversial, occurred in March 2023<sup>10</sup>. Through the analysis of these discussions, we could conclude that there are two possible approaches to describing the prohibitions imposed on a literary work.

- On the one hand, there are properties that allow linking an element corresponding to a literary work to a value (class or instance) that expresses the censorship status.

Furthermore, this value can be described in detail through qualifiers, and following Wikidata's data model, references can be incorporated to support the statement.

- On the other hand, the element corresponding to a literary work can be linked through the property “part of” (P361) to a list of banned works, such as, for example, Index Librorum Prohibitorum (Q22765).

The first approach is the one that has generated a more intense debate, and although the discussion within Wikidata talk:WikiProject Books/2020 - and other sources we will reference - seems to have reached a consensus, the evidence collected shows that the resulting solution is not yet being applied consistently.

We will exemplify the development of the solutions by tracking the work “Ulysses” by James Joyce, the item for which on Wikidata has the identifier Q6511<sup>11</sup>. Reviewing the revision history of this item allows us to identify and analyse the different solutions that have been applied over time.

The technical descriptions below make use of the terms ‘property’ and ‘class’, which are terms used in the Wikidata metadata schema to describe Wikidata records<sup>12</sup>

### **Solution 1: Property ‘instance of’ (P31), with the class ‘banned book’ (Q65770793) as the value.**

The property ‘instance of’ (P31) expresses that the item it refers to is a concrete object (instance) of this class, category, or group of objects. For expressing a book prohibition, the object of this property must be the class ‘banned book’ (Q65770793), which is described in the following terms: “book that has been censored by somebody.” The nature, circumstances, dates, and other details of the prohibition are also detailed with properties that incorporate the class ‘banned book’ within the scope of their domain restriction. For example, the property ‘jurisdiction’ (P1001), the value of which will be the territorial scope (country, state, municipality..) where the prohibition applies, or the ‘start date’ (P580) and ‘end date’ (P582) of the prohibition, and others that describe the details of the prohibition further.

In the case of “Ulysses,” the record was updated, and two declarations about the prohibition of the work were added following the ‘instance of’ (P31) and ‘banned book’ (Q65770793) solution devised in May 2020. One prohibition corresponds to the ‘jurisdiction’ of the United States of America, and the other to the United Kingdom. In the first prohibition, the statement was substantiated with a reference.

In the 2020 discussion we referred to, two drawbacks are pointed out in the application of this solution.

- Firstly, the property 'instance of' (P31) has an excessively broad, general meaning. Let's keep in mind that this property is part of the small group of properties in Wikidata that express membership of something.
- Secondly, the possibility of specifying the territorial or institutional scope of the effects of the prohibition can multiply to levels that are difficult to manage. Imagine a prohibition on a work established by the school board of a territory. Specifying each of the schools linked to the board would multiply the statements, assertions, and references about the statements to levels that are difficult to handle.

In the revision of the “Ulysses” data page on December 9, 2020, the deletion of statements with the property 'instance of' (P31) and the value 'banned book' (Q65770793) can be seen. Currently, the SPARQL query on the Wikidata Query Service related to this pattern of statements returns no results, because it has been superseded by the solution below.

### **Solution 2: Property 'significant event' (P793), and an 'instance of' classes like 'legal act', 'legal case', etc. as the value.**

The property 'significant event' (P793) expresses a notable event related to the subject of the statement. As for the object of this property, the debate led to a final consensus that it should be an 'instance of' using classes such as:

- 'Legal act' (Q1864008), defined as a “juridical fact in which the subject who made it happen acted under free will.”
- 'Legal proceeding' (Q8016240), defined as the “coming together of parties to a dispute to present information in a tribunal,” or its subclass, 'legal case' (Q8016240), defined as a “dispute resolved by a tribunal.”

In the case of “Ulysses,” the configuration of Solution 2 has been put in place now, in two statements using the property 'significant event' (P793) with the following values, respectively: Obscenity trial of Ulysses in The Little Review (Q16153541) - instances of the classes 'legal act' and 'legal proceeding' - and United States v. One Book Called Ulysses (Q2895062) - an instance of the class 'legal case'.

However, the editing history of the item “Ulysses” (Q6511) shows the following fluctuations in the treatment of the property 'significant event' (P793) until arriving at the current configuration.

- Application of the class 'banned book' (Q65770793) as the value of 'significant event' (P793), instead of 'instances of' classes related to legal events such as 'legal act', 'legal proceeding', etc., partially following the model seen in Solution 1.

- Application of subclasses of the class ‘censorship’ (Q543) as the value of ‘significant event’ (P793) to delineate the geographical scope of the prohibitions, for example, book censorship in the United States (Q4942971). This specification of ‘jurisdiction’, start and end dates, etc., is done using the qualifiers we observed in Solution 1.

Another example that shows the fluctuations in the application of the property ‘significant event’ (P793) as an expression of prohibitions is that, for a brief period between 12 December 2020, and 13 December 2020, the application of this property for statements related to prohibitions in the United States coexisted with the reinstatement of the property ‘instance of’ (P31), with the class ‘banned book’ (Q65770793) as the value for the prohibition in the United Kingdom.

This example showcases the advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches. With the use of the property ‘instance of’ (P31), the declaration of the prohibition is more general and may require the addition of new statements to specify institutions (e.g., schools) where it applies. But, with the use of the property ‘significant event’ (P793), it is possible to specify the description of the prohibition to a judicial or administrative act, which, being an entity in itself, can be described in its own data entry.

Overall, it is observed that the optimum resolution of this issue leans towards Solution 2, i.e. the use of a specific property, determined by identifying the specific ‘legal act’ that defines the basis for the prohibition of the literary work. This is the current solution in the description of the item “Ulysses” (Q6511), and according to Wikidata talk:WikiProject Books, it garners the majority consensus.

The current reality is that Solution 2 is not fully implemented yet, as evidenced by the fact that executing a SPARQL query on the Wikidata Query Service to retrieve all literary work prohibitions expressed with the property ‘significant event’ (P793) returns only the statements linked to the item “Ulysses” (Q6511).

- The academic coordinators of the Semantic Web course intend to resume work on literary work prohibitions in Wikidata during the 2023-2024 academic year. Following the recommendations outlined in the archived discussion on Wikidata talk:WikiProject Books, this work will have two main focuses: consolidate Solution 2 as a model for handling literary work prohibitions and apply it in relevant cases and transfer data from Wikipedia<sup>13</sup> to Wikidata to expand the number of descriptions about prohibitions.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> <https://borgenproject.org/book-banning-and-censorship-across-the-globe/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>
- <sup>3</sup> [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/EveryBooksItsReader\\_2023](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/EveryBooksItsReader_2023)
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.ub.edu/portal/web/information-audiovisual-media/home>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://wikimedia.cat/tag/bibliowikis/>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.upf.edu/web/iguaitat/viquidonesupf>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://wikimedia.cat>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.ub.edu/wikiwomen/>
- <sup>9</sup> [https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata\\_talk:WikiProject\\_Books/2020](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata_talk:WikiProject_Books/2020)
- <sup>10</sup> [https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata\\_talk:WikiProject\\_Books/2023](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata_talk:WikiProject_Books/2023)
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q6511>
- <sup>12</sup> [https://www.mediawiki.org/w/index.php?title=Wikibase/DataModel#Overview\\_of\\_the\\_data\\_model](https://www.mediawiki.org/w/index.php?title=Wikibase/DataModel#Overview_of_the_data_model)
- <sup>13</sup> For example, a list of banned books like: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste\\_von\\_Autoren,\\_deren\\_Werke\\_auf\\_dem\\_Index\\_librorum\\_prohibitorum\\_standen](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_von_Autoren,_deren_Werke_auf_dem_Index_librorum_prohibitorum_standen)

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Make contact with librarians around the world and start networking!

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Follow us to get the latest updates on CILIP ILIG news and events, tweets from CILIP conference, news from CILIP and of international interest, and to communicate with us and let us know what you would like CILIP ILIG to do for you.



# Finding Utopia in Belgium

As I wandered in glorious sunshine past the deckchairs and buckets and spades and heard the gulls it felt a bit like Utopia. In fact it was Utopia for that's the name of a fantastic new library to be found in Aalst a small town of about 90,000 people in East Flanders in Belgium.

If the title Utopia sounds a bit precocious it's as well to hear the reason. The first printing press in Belgium was in Aalst and printer Dirk Martens was overjoyed to be asked to print a famous English novel, Utopia by Thomas More. So, the name Utopia has always been associated with Aalst.

That's the name dealt with, but why the buckets and spades? It's the library's way of bringing the seaside to an inland town during the school holiday. There is a great big sandpit, lots of deck chairs, an ice cream stall, and even some seagulls had taken the trouble to come inland.



*Aalst Library is built of Flanders bricks as seen by this view of the Front*

So, whilst the seaside outside is good, it's the inside that gives the wow factor. Flanders brick and a spacious open feeling. The library is five years old and was designed by KAAAN Architects from Rotterdam.

The building is part new and part rebuilt but has managed to be seamless in appearance. The undoubted success of the library is shown in the large number of users during my visit though, of course, I have tried to avoid people in my pictures.

Well worth a diversion if you are in Brussels, Ghent or Antwerp.



*Also in brick is the side*



*Large windows are a feature*



*The seaside features*



*The spacious interior makes a feature of the stairs*



*The mezzanines give a feeling of spaciousness*



*The library is on four floors*



# Books Unbanned: Protecting the Freedom to Read for America's Youth

co-authored by the Communications Teams of both The Brooklyn Public Library and The Seattle Public Library

Public libraries in the United States have long stood as beacons of intellectual freedom, upholding the rights of all people to free and unrestricted access to ideas and information. By design, library collections include books and other materials representing a wide range of beliefs and perspectives from authors of diverse backgrounds and experiences. This helps ensure that each of our patrons, regardless of their age or interests, can find the right book for them through their public library.

Intellectual freedom, and the freedom to read in particular, is essential to personal liberty and growth, as well as informed civic participation and the healthy functioning of a democracy. Reading allows us to explore our wider world, learn about ourselves and others, and imagine new and better possibilities.

There have always been those who would try to control what others can read in order to control what they think, care about or imagine. Although U.S. courts, including the Supreme Court, have regularly affirmed that the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees and protects the freedom to read, attempts to ban books continue, often based on concerns about morality, social order or national security.

While censorship in the U.S. has an extended history, it has reached new heights over the last few years. In March 2023, the American Library Association's (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom reported<sup>1</sup> that 2022 saw a record number of censorship attempts to library books and resources. More than 2,500 unique titles were challenged, a 38% increase since in 2021. 48% of book challenges targeted materials in public libraries. In August 2023, the ALA released preliminary data documenting a continued increase in censorship attempts across public, school, and academic libraries during the first eight months of 2023, with 695 attempts to restrict or ban over 1,900 titles.

In some states, laws have been proposed to reduce funding for libraries or even expose librarians to criminal charges for simply making books available to the public that are deemed "inappropriate" by government officials<sup>2</sup>.

The majority of censorship efforts in recent years seek to prohibit young people from accessing age-appropriate stories, information and ideas about race, gender and sexuality. According to the ALA report, 58% of challenges targeted books and materials in school libraries, classroom libraries or school curricula, and the majority of these materials were written by or about members of the LGBTQ+ community and people of color.



While book challenges have increased at an exponential rate across the U.S., some communities have been more affected than others. In New York City and Seattle, our communities have shown strong support for their library systems and appreciation for diverse collections. Across 27 locations of The Seattle Public Library (SPL), only a few requests to remove materials are received each year. While Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) receives regular comments and complaints, the library has only received three formal challenges in the past five years. However, reports from our colleagues in the profession indicated that there are many pockets of the country where book challenges are more frequent and where there is less overall community support for libraries.



*Books Unbanned Logo*

Library patrons, donors and supporters in Brooklyn, Seattle, and nationwide have eagerly supported efforts to expand access to books and ideas for young people who are acutely experiencing the impacts of censorship. In April 2022, BPL launched a program to protect the right to read and fight censorship by offering a free library card for teens and young adults ages 13-21 across the nation, providing access to BPL's digital collection of e-books, e-audiobooks and databases. SPL was the second system to join the program a year later in April 2023, offering a free Books Unbanned digital library card for teens and young adults ages 13 to 26 across the U.S. who do not live in Seattle or our broader service area.

To ensure increased usage of BPL's digital materials doesn't affect the borrowing needs of Brooklyn residents, Books Unbanned is fully supported through private philanthropy with individuals and foundations from across the country providing funding for digital collections. Gifts ranging from \$1-\$50,000 have come from individual donors in all 50 states and several countries abroad. SPL's Books Unbanned card is funded by private support through The Seattle Public Library Foundation (SPLF), not public funds, which ensures that public resources remain protected for local patrons. SPLF donors have shown enthusiastic support for the program, donating 100% of the Foundation's goal for Books Unbanned as of November 2023.

Since April 2022, BPL has issued over 7300 cards, and cardholders have checked out over 170,000 books. In the first six months of SPL's program, over 6,000 young people signed up and checked out about 27,000 unique titles more than 55,000 times. The program has received significant media attention across the U.S., particularly during Banned Books Month every fall, which helps spread the word about the program to impacted youth and teens who can benefit.

For both programs, young people have signed up from every state in the U.S. as well as D.C., Guam and Puerto Rico. SPL has seen the most sign-ups per capita from Florida, Texas, Vermont, Alaska and Idaho (Texas, Florida and Idaho are among the top states experiencing censorship, according to the ALA<sup>3</sup>). States with the most cardholders by number are from California, Texas, Florida, New York and Washington.

### Seattle Public Library

Since launching Books Unbanned, hundreds of young people have shared messages



# The Seattle Public Library

thanking the libraries for sharing our collections and telling us what the freedom to read means to them. Their stories are a testament to the importance of intellectual freedom and free access to books. We've heard from young people who are physically disabled and can't get to a library, whose neighborhood isn't served by a library, who are worried about bans in their state, whose libraries cannot afford to offer alternative reading formats like audiobooks for their accessibility needs, and who want access to a diverse range of books and authors. Their comments remind us that young people – like all of us – crave the access, freedom, and privacy to read stories that reflect their own experiences and identity, that challenge them, that offer joy and escape, and that help them discover themselves and form their own opinions.

As one 16-year-old in Texas wrote to The Seattle Public Library, “I live in a town where the library system is under heavy scrutiny and I do not believe I have (been) freely given access to materials I think I should be able to read. This card would let me anonymously obtain content to both educate and entertain myself without a third party censoring what I should alone be deciding for myself.”

A 17-year-old teen from North Carolina reminds us that we should be encouraging teens to engage with books more often, particularly in the age of “doomscrolling,” which we know is impacting the mental health of youth in the U.S.: “This card would give me full permission to use my free time to learn and think rather than scrolling through my phone. I want to actively engage with the world and new ideas.”

## Brooklyn Public Library



# Bklyn Public Library

Books Unbanned is expanding. In September 2023, three more libraries joined the program: Boston Public Library, LA County Public Library, and San Diego Public Library. With five U.S. libraries partnering together, and hopefully more to come, we are building a national resource to resist censorship, upholding the freedom to read for America's youth, and expanding access to the world of ideas. As more libraries join, we increase our capacity to serve more young readers with the stories that they want to read so that they can build the future they want to see.

## References

<sup>1</sup> ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom (Sep 2023) Banned and Challenged Books “Censorship by The Numbers” Available at: <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/by-the-numbers>

<sup>2</sup> Every Library (Jun 2023) “New Report: Unpacking 2023 Legislation of Concern for Libraries” Available at: [https://www.everylibrary.org/unpacking\\_2023\\_legislation\\_concern\\_report](https://www.everylibrary.org/unpacking_2023_legislation_concern_report)

<sup>3</sup> ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom (Sep 2023) Banned and Challenged Books “Censorship By The Numbers” Available at: <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/by-the-numbers>



There are several several changes in roles to announce on the CILIP ILIG committee.

- **Anna Jablowska** is stepping down from the secretary role after joining the committee in 2010, and becoming Secretary in Feb 2012
- **Sarah Brain** is changing roles from Treasurer to Secretary
- **Sally Bell** is now sole Honorary Treasurer
- **Alice Tyler** is stepping down as the Associate Editor of Focus
- **Ian Stringer** is now taking up the role of Associate Editor of Focus

The whole committee expresses our thanks for those who are leaving for their services, and those who are taking up new roles.

## Notes for contributors to Focus

Articles for publication in Focus are always welcome. Focus is not peer-reviewed, and articles are primarily intended to keep readers (who are professionals from a variety of different types of library and information services) informed about what is going on in the international library and information world, to introduce new ideas and programmes, report on activities and experiences, etc., rather than be 'academic treatises'.

Articles are normally between 1,500 and 2,000 words, though can be a little longer if necessary. The inclusion of references and URLs/links to further information is valuable, as are relevant photos (640 × 480 at 300dpi), if appropriate.

Focus is usually produced twice a year, with publication normally happening in July and December. Copy deadlines are typically at the end of May and October.

Please email material for consideration to the editor at [iligfocus@cilip.org.uk](mailto:iligfocus@cilip.org.uk)

Articles should normally not have been previously published, or be under consideration elsewhere.

# **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

## **CILIP ILIG INFORMALS AND MEETINGS**

### **CILIP Leadership Conference**

10-11 July 2024 – Birmingham UK

more information at

<https://cilipconference.org.uk/>

### **Librarying SDGs: sharing experiences from WLIC 2023**

a series of webinars between February 2024 and April 2024 planned by the IFLA Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Division

first webinars 2 February 2024 and 4 April 2024

<https://www.ifla.org/events/librarying-sdgs-sharing-experiences-from-wlic-2023/>

Please note that the IFLA World Library and Information Congress 2024 has been cancelled

Keep an eye on the CILIP ILIG Events page on the CILIP website for further listings and booking information:

<https://bit.ly/2zC2TQq>

