

Chapter 2

Definitions, scope and dimensions

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Having provided some background on the development of international activities in librarianship and on the rationales and motivations of those

engaged in them or writing about them, and having identified some current global trends that make an international awareness essential for our profession, in this chapter I put forward definitions of international and comparative librarianship, delimit their scope and explore the national and international dimensions of LIS systems.

Definition and scope of international librarianship¹

International librarianship and comparative librarianship first appeared under their respective names in the 1950s and their literatures continued to overlap during the 1960s through the 1980s, during which time much energy was devoted to defining each and attempting to distinguish between them. Clearer definitions were developed during the mid-1970s by J. Stephen Parker and J. Periam Danton respectively. However, some confusion persisted until the early 1990s, by which time interest in the field had declined. In practice the two fields are often grouped together as “international and comparative librarianship” or “international and comparative library science.” Nevertheless, the two fields can and should be distinguished.

The origins and early definitions of international librarianship have been articulated by Havard-Williams (1972), Danton (1974, 1977), Parker (1974), Harvey (1973, 1977), Foskett (1976), Vickery and Brown (1977), Keresztesi (1981) and Krzys and Litton (1983). Some more recent contributions and further clarifications have been attempted by Sami (1991), Bliss (1993) Liu (2008), Lor (2008, 2009) and Tammaro (2009). However, Parker's definition has been widely cited and it serves as an authoritative point of departure:

International librarianship consists of activities carried out

¹ In this section I draw heavily on the entry ‘International and Comparative Librarianship’ which I contributed to the *Encyclopedia of library and information Science*, 3rd ed. (Lor 2010).

among or between governmental or non-governmental institutions, organizations, groups or individuals of two or more nations, to promote, establish, develop, maintain and evaluate library, documentation and allied services, and librarianship and the library profession generally, in any part of the world (Parker 1974: 221).

This definition deserves closer scrutiny. In the following paragraphs I also use the definition as a framework for delimiting the scope of international librarianship and, by that token, of this book.

Libraries and LIS

As the term ‘librarianship’ indicates, international librarianship is concerned with *libraries*. In this book the term ‘libraries’ is interpreted broadly to include related information service agencies such as documentation centers, community media centers, community information centers, telecenters, bibliographic and resource sharing networks, consortia and utilities. Although harmonization and the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) movement will be touched on later, galleries, archives and museums fall outside the scope of this book. Thus the scope corresponds roughly to what is usually understood by ‘library and information services’ (LIS). When this acronym is used here, it will refer to ‘library and information services’ and not to ‘library and information science’.

A field of activity

International librarianship is a *field of activity*, rather than a scientific discipline. The term ‘librarianship’ fell into disfavor a generation or more ago, and was widely replaced with ‘library science’. Today, however, we seem to be a bit embarrassed by the presumption the phrase embodies. Is library science really a science? In what used to be

called ‘library schools’ there has been a gradual migration to ‘library and information science’ or ‘library and information studies’, after which point the ‘L word’ (library) tends to be dropped (Dillon 2007). Information science is more quantitative and looks more like a ‘science’ as it is understood in the English-speaking world.² This leaves ‘librarianship’, freed from scientific pretensions, to denote the activities in which librarians (and by extension information workers in the related information agencies mentioned above) are engaged.³ That is how the term is used in this book. I have no intention of establishing either an international *library science* or an *international library science*. This does not, of course, prevent the international activities in LIS from being studied systematically (as is intended in this book) and with scientific detachment and rigor.

Relationships

The activities are conducted in a *relationship* “among or between” parties at various levels, ranging from individuals to governments. Such activities, among others, include resource sharing, standardization, development aid, political and cultural influences, relations between and/or among national associations, and exchanges of staff, students and scholars.

In a chapter on Mexican and US library relations, Seal (1996:70) listed the potential scope for such an account as encompassing “one-on-one interactions between librarians, the purchase of foreign imprints, attendance at conferences, the exchange of personnel, interlibrary loan, library school programs, etc.” It covers all these and more, although

² In continental Europe this would not be a problem. In German, for example, library science, theology or art history can all be called *Wissenschaft*.

³ This is not to imply that librarianship is to be subsumed under information science or to deny that librarianship is deserving of scholarly study and teaching. (Cf. Crowley 2008:143).

activities of individual librarians, being “infrequently documented”, does not receive much attention.

Two or more nations

These parties are located in *two or more nations* (countries). This stipulation raises the question of what is meant by “international.” Strictly speaking, relations between two countries are referred to as “bilateral” and purists would restrict the use of the term “international” to refer to relations between more than two countries (Keresztesi 1981), but in international librarianship this distinction is seldom observed. That point disposed of, is ‘international’ the most appropriate word? Other candidates are:

- ‘World’ as in ‘world librarianship’. The title of the monograph by Krzys and Litton (1983) is *World librarianship: a comparative study*, the title being explained as referring to “world study in librarianship” and to ‘the worldwide aspects of our profession’ (p.ix). The use of the term ‘world’ suggests phenomena that are worldwide in nature or worldwide studies of such phenomena. This does not adequately describe our field, which may include studies of LIS relationships between just two countries.
- ‘Global’ as in ‘global librarianship’. ‘Global’ occurs in the titles of several recent books in the field, notably in those by McCook, Ford and Lippincott (1998), Kesselman and Weintraub (2004) and Abdullahi (2009). Stueart (2007) included both words (‘global’ and ‘international’) in the title of his book. Currently the term ‘global’, with its derivatives ‘globalization’ and ‘glocal’, is in common use and thus its use in this context is not surprising. However, like the term ‘world’ it does connote phenomena that are worldwide in nature and ‘span the globe’. This is true of some themes in international librarianship, but not in all. The work of IFLA or UNESCO in promoting libraries is global, but library cooperation between

the Nordic countries is not. It is worth noting, however, that in the context of comparative education Schriewer (2006:325-326) makes a case for the use of “global” because established ideas based on national citizenship and identity are being overtaken by “transnational” and “postnational” theoretical perspectives, where “the term ‘global’ is meant to call one’s attention to the multiple inter-societal and inter-regional flows, exchanges and interactions that have contributed to an ever more interconnected world (p.326). Hantrais (2009:2-3) discusses the use of these and related terms (cross-national, transnational) in the context of international comparative social science research.

- ‘Foreign’ as in ‘foreign librarianship’. A great deal of the literature in our field can correctly be designated as ‘foreign librarianship’, but this point is dealt with separately below.

International

In American English the word ‘international’ is commonly used (as in ‘international student’ or ‘international visitors’) where British English would use ‘foreign’ (as in ‘foreign student’ or ‘foreign visitors’). This gives rise to much conceptual confusion. American authors frequently use the term ‘international librarianship’ when they mean librarianship in countries other than the United States. In terms of Parker’s definition a report on librarianship or information work in a country other than the writer’s own is not *ipso facto* considered to be a contribution to international librarianship. To qualify as a contribution to international librarianship a book or article should not merely describe conditions in another country. An article about school libraries in Lombardy, Italy, is no more international than an article about school libraries in Wisconsin, regardless of where the author is based. Consider the following:

1. An article about school libraries in Lombardy, by an Italian author
2. An article about school libraries in Lombardy, by an American author
3. An article about school libraries in Wisconsin by an Italian author

4. An article about school libraries in Wisconsin by an American author

We can double the number of cases by specifying for each case where the article is published, in the USA or Italy:

No.	Study area	Nationality of author	Country of publication
1a	Lombardy, Italy	Italian	Italy
1b	Lombardy, Italy	Italian	USA
2a	Lombardy, Italy	US	Italy
2b	Lombardy, Italy	US	USA
3a	Wisconsin, USA	Italian	Italy
3b	Wisconsin, USA	Italian	USA
4a	Wisconsin, USA	US	Italy
4b	Wisconsin, USA	US	USA

Which of the eight resulting cases constitute a contribution to international (as distinct from foreign) librarianship? Actually, none. The nationality of the author (or the author's place of residence or the place of publication) should not be the criterion for categorizing a contribution as international librarianship. Parker's definition implies that there should be an international dimension in terms of relationships between countries. Such relationships could take the form of joint activities, influences of one country on another, flows of information between countries, participation in international organizations, partnerships, receiving library development aid from international or foreign organizations, and the like.

In practice this requirement is often ignored. There is some merit in the argument that an author from one country may bring fresh insights to library conditions in another country and therefore the work qualifies to be regarded as a contribution to international librarianship. The well-known book of the Norwegian librarian, Wilhelm Munthe (1939), on American librarianship is often cited as such an example. This may provide much insight as well as raw material for international and

comparative studies, but it is not a contribution to international librarianship in the sense that that term is used in this book.

As suggested above, this book also deals with the activities of international organizations that are concerned with librarianship and information work. Intergovernmental organizations such as the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and international non-governmental organizations such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) can be said to fall within Parker's definition because they conduct multilateral international relations. The library and information units that serve such organizations are also often dealt with as part of international librarianship. This is stretching Parker's definition somewhat, but can be justified on the basis that such units commonly provide bibliographic and other services world-wide. They are considered to fall within the scope of international librarianship and are touched on in this book.

Expanded definition

In summary for the purposes of this book I paraphrase and expand Parker's definition to define international librarianship as follows:

International librarianship encompasses:

- activities, processes, influences, interactions and other phenomena
- relating to libraries and the allied information agencies commonly referred to as 'information services'
- at any level of aggregation, including governmental or non-governmental institutions, organizations, groups or individuals
- in a relationship
- involving two or more countries,
- where 'two or more countries' may also refer to international organizations active in the field of library and information services or the libraries of international organizations.

Definition and scope of comparative librarianship⁴

During the 1960s and 1970s the origins and definitions of comparative librarianship were discussed by various writers, including Foskett (1965, 1976, 1977), Shores (1966, 1970), Simsova & MacKee (1970, 1975), Collings (1971), Harvey (1973) and Yayakuru (1974), with later contributions by Wang (1985) and Kumar (1987). Much of the discussion has been inconclusive and repetitive and did not add much to the work of Danton (1973, 1977). Having systematically and critically reviewed all prior attempts to define comparative librarianship and delimit its scope, J. Periam Danton in 1973 in effect refined the definition of Collings (1971:492) to arrive at what remains the most authoritative and appropriate definition of the field to date. He states that comparative librarianship is an:

...area of scholarly investigation and research (that) may be defined as the analysis of libraries, library systems, some aspect of librarianship, or library problems in two or more national, cultural or societal environments, in terms of socio-political, economic, cultural, ideological, and⁵ historical contexts. This analysis is for the purpose of understanding the underlying similarities and differences and for determining explanations of the differences, with the ultimate aim of trying to arrive at valid generalizations and principles.” (1973:52)

Danton’s definition emphasizes three essential aspects of comparative librarianship: a “cross-societal or cross-cultural element”, comparison, and the construction of theory.

⁴ In this section I draw heavily on the entry ‘International and Comparative Librarianship’ which I contributed to the *Encyclopedia of library and information Science*, 3rd ed. (Lor 2010).

⁵ In a later essay, Danton (1977:4) responded to comments received on this by replacing ‘and’ with ‘and/or’. This does not seem to make much of a difference.

A “cross-societal or cross-cultural element”

There has to be a “cross-societal or cross-cultural element”. Mostly this is cross-country or international, but the comparison can be conducted within a single country, provided that the societal, cultural or ideological differences are such that they can give rise to differences in the nature of the library as an institution. Hence a comparison of public libraries in the German, French and Italian speaking cantons of Switzerland can legitimately be classified as comparative librarianship, but a comparison of the library use of working class and middle class Britons would not.

On this point opinions diverge. While Danton, basing his position on the example of disciplines such as comparative education, comparative law and comparative sociology, insists on the cross-societal, cross-cultural or cross-country element, other writers such as D.J. Foskett (1976), Simsova & MacKee (1970, 1975) and Sami (1991) open the door to comparisons that are not cross-societal or cross-cultural in scope. In a contribution to the same volume as Danton’s (1977) essay, Foskett (1977:17) used the example of comparative studies in botany and zoology to argue that no international element is necessary in comparative librarianship, and that “one might study the working of a special library and a public library in the same town, or the effectiveness of a dictionary catalogue and a classified catalogue in the same library”. Kumar (1987:5) suggested that comparative librarianship “has two aspects, namely: (a) comparison of library situations; and (b) comparison of librarianship and library development in general in different geographical situations.” He thought that studies of the former kind would be useful in bringing about “qualitative change in library service”. In current parlance this would be referred to as benchmarking. Studies of the latter kind (which would be in line with Danton’s concept of comparative librarianship) would be helpful in bringing about “quantitative change in library service”, where his concern is with stages and factors in library development.

I too (Lor 2008) have argued that not all comparative librarianship needs to be international, cross-societal or cross-cultural. However, I have since then come to see the error of this argument. Since comparisons of one sort or another are inherent in all empirical research, if Foskett's argument is followed the greater part of research in library science could be labeled as "comparative librarianship" and the scope of the field would in effect expand to include the scholarly study of all of librarianship.

It has to be noted, however, that in the literature of other comparative disciplines such as comparative education and comparative social studies, this issue has not been settled, more recent texts tending again to a more liberal interpretation which accommodates a greater range of studies (cf. Hantrais 2009:3-5).

Comparison

There have to be "actual comparisons," which go beyond mere descriptions or juxtaposition of data. Comparison implies the analysis of the similarities and differences in the sets of data collected. This is to be discussed in detail in later chapters.

Theory

An attempt should be made to explain the observed similarities and differences with a view to building theory. Thus comparative librarianship is described as a discipline which employs a rigorous scientific methodology, on the pattern of other, older comparative disciplines such as comparative education. (As will be discussed in Chapter 3 this does reflect a positivistic approach, which needs to be looked at critically.)

Expanded definition

In summary for the purposes of this book I paraphrase and expand Danton's definition to define comparative librarianship as encompassing:

Comparative librarianship is:

- an area of scholarly study
- that analyses
- and explicitly compares
- LIS phenomena
- in two or more countries
- or significantly different cultural or societal environments
- in terms of contextual factors (social, economic, political, cultural, etc.)
- in order to distinguish and understand underlying similarities and differences
- and arrive at valid generalizations

Distinction between international librarianship and comparative librarianship

As Danton (1977) pointed out, a considerable literature about the definitions of international and comparative librarianship arose more or less at the same time that Parker's definition of international librarianship and Danton's own (1973) definition of comparative librarianship appeared. The result is a literature in which there is much discussion but no clear consensus on the distinction between international librarianship and comparative librarianship. Attempts to distinguish between the two have generally taken one or more of the following approaches:

- Hierarchical: comparative librarianship is a species of the genus international librarianship or vice versa (Liu 2008). For example, Harvey (1973:296-297) subsumed “comparative library science” (along with “foreign library science” and “international institutional library science” under “international library science”. Krzys and Litton (1982) subsumed both “international library science” and “comparative library science” under “world library science”. Kawatra (1987:viii) appeared to think that comparative librarianship includes international librarianship. Against this it has to be pointed out that attempts to impose such hierarchical relationships are problematic if the concepts belong to different categories: “international” denotes a geographic scope, whereas “comparative” denotes a methodology.
- Study – Activity: comparative librarianship is the scientific study, while international librarianship is the field of professional activity, often conceived in a rather soft and idealistic manner as aiming to promote international understanding and cooperation (Kumar 1987). A more rigorous distinction was made by Miles Jackson: “International librarianship is limited strictly to those activities that involve librarianship and all its aspects across national boundaries. It would thereby exclude comparative analysis, but include such activities as exchange of librarians, books, ideas, and the study of the library systems in different countries. ...comparative librarianship should lean on the tradition of comparative studies found in other fields such as political, government and legal studies” (Jackson 1981:xxx). Against this it should be pointed out that the “activities” included under international librarianship can and should also be subjected to systematic and rigorous investigation.
- Subject – Methodology: international librarianship is the subject field while comparative librarianship is the methodology. According to Collings (1971:493) comparative librarianship is a

“scholarly method of investigation”. Keresztesi (1981:437) has stated that “comparative librarianship is essentially a method of enquiry”. Against this it has to be pointed out that more than one methodology can be used to study international librarianship. Parker (1974) described comparative librarianship as a tool, the most appropriate one, for international librarianship. However, it is not the only tool.

In this author’s view international librarianship comprises activities in which librarians and information workers are engaged. These activities and related phenomena can be subjected to scholarly investigation, but international librarianship is not *per se* a scholarly or scientific discipline. Comparative librarianship on the other hand is a scholarly field in which specific – comparative – methods are applied for the primary purpose of extending our understanding of library phenomena of all kinds. International librarianship provides raw material for comparative librarianship. Comparative librarianship yields theoretical insights that *inter alia* help provide a sounder basis for international activities.

In practice the terms “international librarianship” and “comparative librarianship” are often used interchangeably or in combination, as in “international and comparative librarianship.” This combination of subject matter is also taught under this name in five of the nine US library schools that offer courses related to international and/or comparative librarianship as surveyed by Liu & Cheng in a book tellingly entitled *International and comparative studies in information and library science* (2008). Nevertheless, the two can and should be clearly distinguished. Concluding a review of the discussion up until 1977, Danton (1977:13) challenged the profession to stop writing *about* comparative librarianship and to start *doing* it. In this spirit no new definitions are offered here. Instead, the definitions of international librarianship by Parker and of comparative librarianship by Danton have been cited and expanded above for explanatory purposes. In any case, discussions of definitional issues have become less frequent since the

1970s.

This discussion underlines the need for a conceptual framework for our field of study. To this end the rest of this chapter is devoted to an exploration of the national and international dimensions of LIS.

Studying national LIS in context

Before exploring the international dimensions of library and information services, it is useful to start with a contextual framework that sets out relationships among the various institutions and agencies that together make up a national system of libraries and information agencies. For short I refer to this somewhat reluctantly as the national LIS (library and information services) *system*. While I recognize that there are many other ways of looking at libraries and related institutions, I have found it useful here to adopt the systems terminology, as proposed by Foskett (1977:16):

...[T]o understand social phenomena, we must have access to a method of investigation which will give reliable results; the comparative method is one such. It involves the systematic study of all types of *institution*, that is, the analysis of each social phenomenon as a system, so that its internal dynamics – the role of each element and its relation to other system elements – are clearly revealed... The dynamics of a single system cannot be fully understood by examining that system in isolation, however, for the way it functions depends on its reaction with its environment as much as on the interactions between its own parts.

My reluctance stems from the limitations of the systems approach if it is interpreted in a mechanistic way with an emphasis on “inputs”, “processing” (in “black boxes”), “outputs” and “feedback” (Hjørland 1998:618). Here I use the term “system” broadly to refer to a dynamic, open, constantly evolving cluster of related entities and activities, with

the emphasis on the multiple contexts within which they develop and function. A further discussion of the systems approach follows in Chapter 3.

FIGURE 2-A is a highly simplified depiction of the LIS system of an imaginary country, Country A. It is intended to illustrate four features:

- External contexts of a national LIS system
- Internal regional differences
- The community and institutional contexts
- The LIS infrastructure

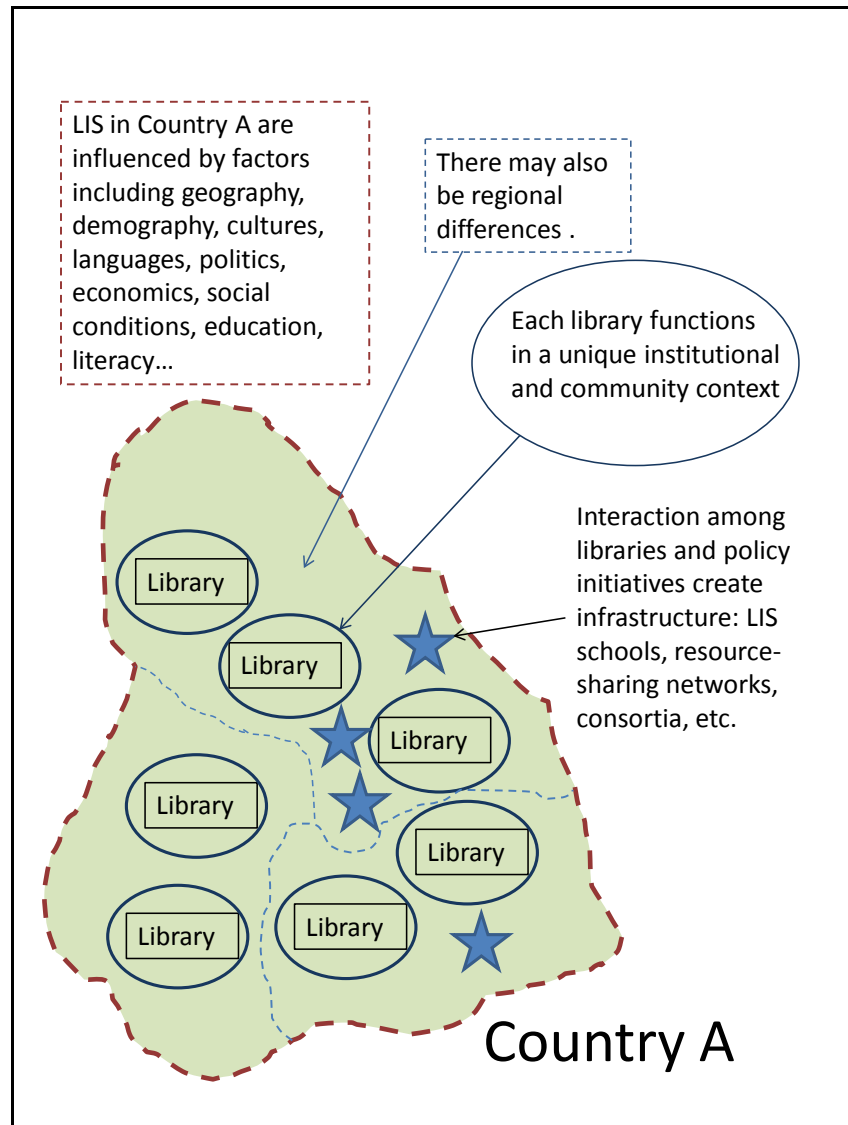
I now discuss these features.

External contexts of a national LIS system

First, multiple contexts influence the development and functioning of libraries and related information agencies in a given country. Here I consider the contexts that can be identified within the country itself. These may include the following:

- Geography: location (region, location in relation to trading partners), size, terrain/topography, climate, natural resources, population density and distribution, distances between centers of population
- Demography: population size, growth, age profile
- Languages: number and status of languages (Is there a dominant language, is it internationally used, what scripts are used, are minor languages written? Are there policies to protect and promote minority languages?)
- Cultures (Multicultural? Dominant cultures, policies to promote multiculturalism? Policies on tangible and intangible cultural heritage)

FIGURE 2-A: LIS system in an imaginary country



- Economics (Resource-based, dependent on fluctuations in world commodity markets, mixed economy, service economy, large or small economy? Respective roles of public and private sectors, state regulation and control, distribution of wealth, corporate and private philanthropy)
- Political system (Unitary or federal state? Democratic, autocratic, single party, multi-party, pluralism? Policies on minorities? Freedom of expression?)
- Legal system
- Public administration (Centralized or decentralized? Efficiency? Corruption? Capacity of local government?)
- Fiscal policies and regulations: tax system, exchange control, tariffs on imports; decision-making authority and accountability in publicly funded institutions (e.g. in some countries librarians are held personally liable for any losses from the collections they manage)
- Transport and communications infrastructure (roads, railroads, harbors, airports, postal services)
- Education system and educational philosophy (universal education? Up to which level? Educational philosophy: rote learning, resource-based, outcomes-based? How centralized is the system? Degree of university autonomy?)
- Research and development, innovation
- Literacy (Literacy level, in which languages, literacy promotion programs?)
- Book industries: authorship, writing in local languages, publishing, bookselling and other forms of distribution, readership, reading culture
- Media: newspapers, magazines, radio, television; pluralism in medias ownership and control
- Information and communications infrastructure: capacity, innovation, ownership & control, cost, reach (teledensity, access to Internet)

The list is reminiscent of the PEST (Political, Economic, Social, Technological) factors that are referred to in management texts (e.g, Stueart & Moran 2007) in the context of strategic planning, but it is much expanded. A similar checklist, derived from Simsova and MacKee (1970), is cited in Krzys and Litton (1983:39). Bengé (1970) also briefly reviews many of these factors. From the point of view of the LIS system the relevance of some of the contexts listed above may not be immediately apparent. Yet they all are relevant, one way or another, to the development, configuration and functioning of a national LIS system. As an example, take a large, rugged, hot, semi-arid country which is sparsely populated and has few natural resources. Per capita income is low, as are educational levels and literacy rates. How do public library services develop within these contexts? Can the country afford to establish public library service points in all population centers? And do the people want libraries? Would bookmobiles be the answer? Can bookmobiles negotiate the country's poorly maintained roads? Can the government afford fuel and spare parts for the vehicles? Now add rich petroleum reserves to this scenario. Or suppose that most of the population adheres to a religion in which a holy book plays a central role, so that literacy is highly valued.

It is helpful to visualize the various external contexts in a hierarchy, with the more basic factors (e.g. the physical geography) which influence all others above them, at the bottom of the pyramid, above those the demographic and socio-economic contexts, the political context, then the physical infrastructure and finally at the top the country's communications and intellectual superstructure, among which we find the library system. This is depicted in FIGURE 2-B.

Figure 2-B: Hierarchy of factors affecting a national LIS system

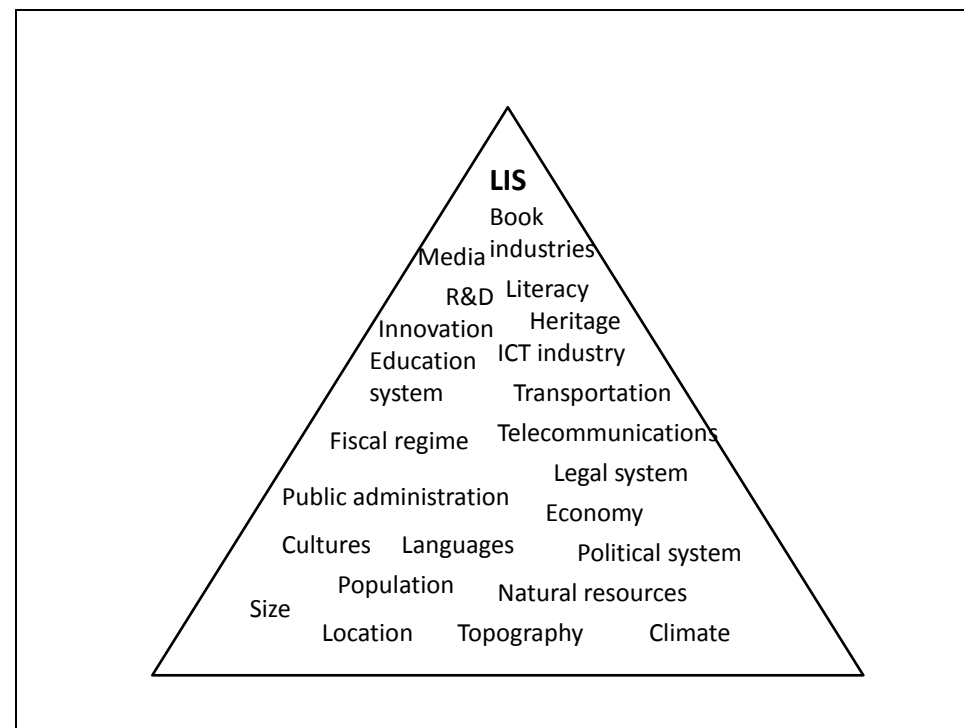


Figure 2-B is by no means comprehensive, and it should also not be taken to imply that one layer is built rigidly upon another, or that lines of influence flow in a deterministic manner. Lines of influence flow in all directions. Only the most basic contexts, at the very bottom of the pyramid, are immutable in the human time scale. But generally we can say that the configuration and functioning of a national LIS system depend in one way or another on all the contexts that are depicted below it.

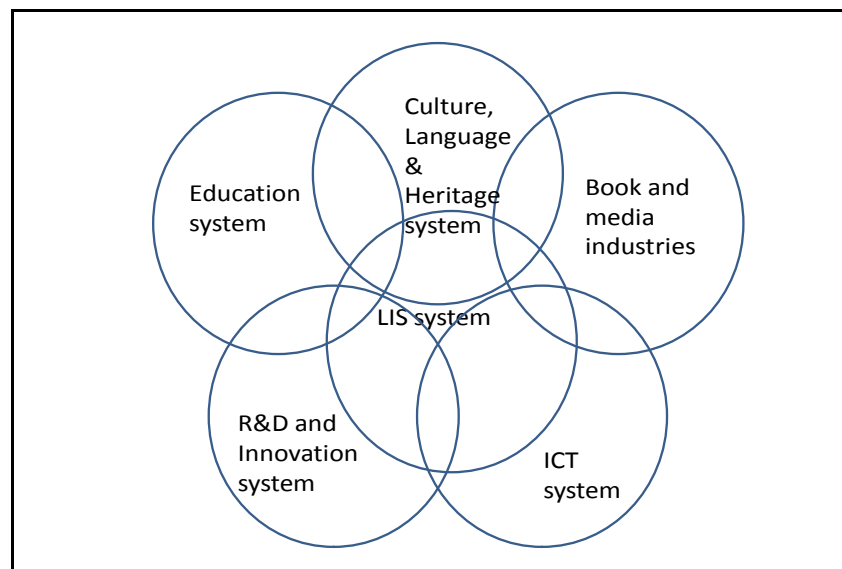
Clustered at the top of the pyramid I have depicted a number of contexts that have the most direct effect on the LIS system. Each of these can be

visualized as a system. Among the more immediately relevant systems are:

- Education
- Research and development, innovation
- Culture, languages and heritage
- Book industries
- Media
- Information and communication technology

Each of these systems has an interface with the LIS system. This is depicted in FIGURE 2-C.

FIGURE 2-C: A national LIS system in relation to other systems



Opinions differ on the relative importance of these systems for LIS. In his well-known “foundations text” (a text intended for foundations courses in American LIS schools), Richard Rubin (2004) devotes the first chapter to “the information infrastructure”, in which he deals with some of these systems. In fact, in line with general US thinking on the place of the library, Rubin places libraries in the context of information flows in society, as part of the “information infrastructure”, and situates them in the “information cycle”, comprising creators, products, distributors, disseminators and users. He places libraries in the category of “disseminators” along with schools, universities, museums, businesses and governmental agencies. (pp.2-3), stating quite forthrightly: “Overall the library can be viewed as an institution involved in the dissemination of information – it is an intermediary between the user and the information that has been created” (p.4). This approach is contested by Crowley (2008:3)), who puts more emphasis on the library as “grounded in human learning” and “capable of meeting educational, learning, reading, and cultural needs” (p.143). My own experience leads me to add heritage to the equation. Hence the range of systems represented in Figure 2-C – which is not exhaustive.

In a developed country these systems may be taken for granted, but they are nonetheless important. But it is in developing countries that weaknesses in these systems, where they occur, are glaringly obvious to LIS workers. For example, in an education system that emphasizes teacher-centered, textbook-based, rote learning, school libraries are likely to be poorly developed. In a country with multiple languages spoken by relatively small groups, authorship and publishing in local languages are likely to be poorly developed, with a negative impact on the availability of appropriate books for public libraries. On the other hand, a well-developed system of research, development and innovation will be a stimulus for the development of research libraries. Such examples can be multiplied, as long as we take care that these systems are not seen as determinants of the LIS system.

Internal regional differences

Second, within a country there may be significant regional difference in respect of one or more of the factors mentioned above. A region or administrative unit such as a province, state, district or county may be closer to or more distant from the capital or from the country's economic hub, it may be sparsely or densely populated, be richer or poorer in natural resources, it may be inhabited by minorities speaking different languages, and, in a federal state, there may be significant differences in education and LIS policies and funding. All of these will affect the libraries in that region.

The community and institutional context

Third, each individual library functions within a given community and institutional context. Few libraries are autonomous institutions. Most form part of, or are controlled by, larger entities such as municipalities, educational institutions, research bodies, government departments or corporations. Each therefore has to function within the legislation applying to its controlling entity, its fiscal and administrative policies, and its organization culture. Within this framework each library has a particular community or communities to serve, which will have particular demographic, socio-economic, cultural, language, educational and other attributes. The match between the library's institutional framework and the communities it serves may be good, not so good, or quite poor. For example, in some countries public libraries form part of cultural and heritage agencies, which emphasize their libraries' antiquarian and custodial functions with the result that they may be poorly attuned to the needs of children and the general public.

The LIS infrastructure

Fourth, the library system will typically have an infrastructure

consisting of, for example:

- A national library association
- A government unit responsible for promoting, coordinating and/or controlling LIS
- National and/or provincial/district advisory, policy-making or coordinating bodies
- Establishments for the education and training of librarians and information workers
- Purchasing consortia
- Regional or national resource-sharing networks
- Specialist suppliers of library materials and equipment

The various components mentioned here together constitute a system. They interact with one another and influence one another. In some countries the system is highly developed and functions relatively smoothly; in others it may be rudimentary or dysfunctional.

Figures 2-A, 2-B and 2-C are highly simplistic representations. In particular, they have two limitations that I need to point out here. First, they picture a country's library system at a given point in time, giving a cross-sectional or synchronic perspective. However, the status of the system at this point in time is the result of historical circumstances in which the various factors listed above have played a role: to assess this requires a diachronic perspective. Most systems have some historical "baggage": traditions, concepts and beliefs that may or may not still be relevant. Historical causes and rationales that are no longer valid may give rise to a dysfunctional system by inhibiting adaptation to changing circumstances and slowing down its development. Such dysfunction cannot be understood outside the historical perspective. For example, in some former French colonies in Africa, a sharp distinction is made between documentalists (roughly equivalent to special librarians in the USA) and librarians, and there is a further distinction between public librarians who have received a vocational college education and librarians working in academic research libraries who are university

graduates and have received government accreditation. In at least one quite small country that I visited this had resulted in three separate library associations and a fragmented profession unable to advocate effectively for libraries. The influences that certain countries have exercised on LIS development in other countries constitutes one of the themes of international librarianship, to be discussed later.

This leads to the second limitation: Figures 2-A and 2-B depict the library system of a country in isolation from all external factors and influences. We need to also consider national library systems in the international context.

The international dimension

International relations

In FIGURE 2-D we start exploring international relations among libraries.

Figure 2-D: Library and information relations between two countries

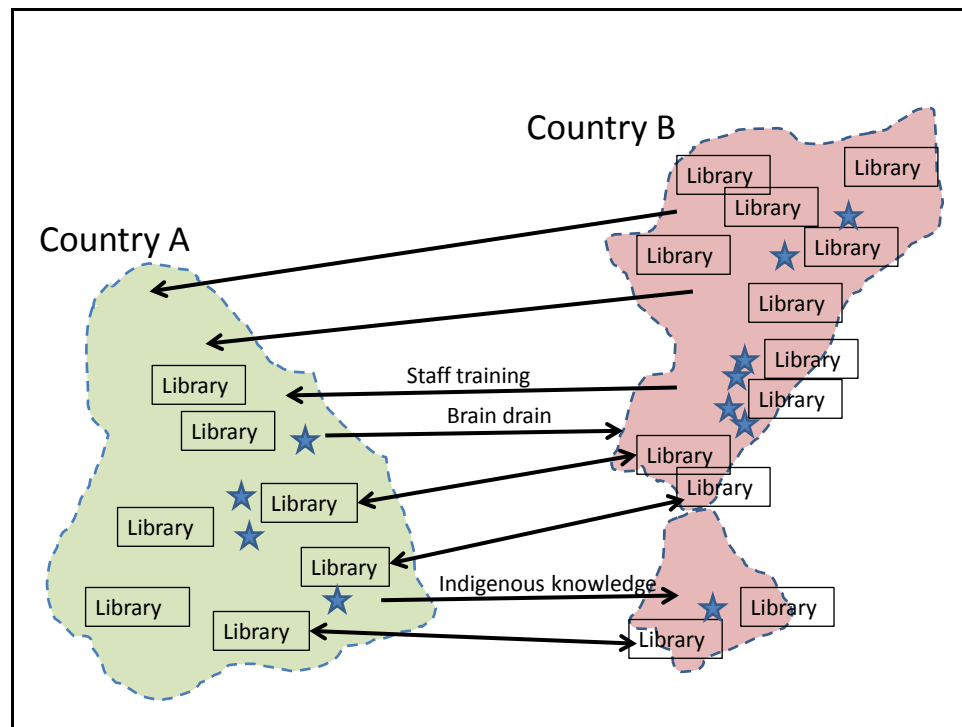


Figure 2-D illustrates a variety of international LIS relations. Some of these are conducted at the national level, country-to-country; others at the institutional level or at the level of individual librarians and information workers. Some happen more or less spontaneously; others are part of formal programs. Some are reciprocal in nature, others are mainly one-way.

At the country-to-country level, international library influences are an interesting theme in international librarianship. These influences

include the diffusion of technology from one country to another, and the adoption and adaptation of technology, practices, procedures, systems, policies and values of one country by another. These processes can be relatively benign and unforced, as in the case of the world-wide adoption of the Dewey *Decimal Classification* (although such adoption is not without negative consequences arising from its American bias) or the diffusion of the American public library ideas to Western Europe. Often, however, there are power relations at work, as in colonial and post-colonial influences of Western European countries on colonies or former colonies, or as in the influence of the Soviet Union on the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The establishment in developing countries of libraries and information services in embassies or culture promotion agencies such as the British Council, and the role of such agencies in promoting library development illustrates the ambivalence of relations between rich and poor. On the one hand, these services responded to an unmet need. On the other, they have been instruments of cultural influence and their efforts to implement some Western ideas, such as the British public library model in Africa, have had unintended negative effects. These will be discussed at greater length later.

Library development aid is a significant theme in international librarianship. The education and training of library staff from developing countries is of great value in building local capacity. But this form of aid can have negative consequences as well, where newly trained librarians find that there is insufficient scope for the exercise of their sophisticated skills in their home countries, and migrate to the country where they were trained, adding to the 'brain drain'. Another prominent form of development aid is book donations, intended to assuage the 'book famine' in developing countries (and sometimes to provide publishers in developed countries with tax breaks).

At the institutional level the most obvious forms of international relations between libraries and information agencies fall under the

rubric of resource sharing: for example, international inter-library loan, the exchange of bibliographic records, or distributed on-line reference. Other examples are joint projects to compile short-title catalogs of early printed books and collaborative projects to microfilm or digitize research materials. In this context I should also mention cooperative work on library standardization, for example the development of international or harmonized cataloging standards. Partnership agreements between libraries, twinning or "sister library" schemes may involve job exchanges, resource sharing, exchanges of publications, reference services etc. They can be entered into by equal partners or unequal partners. In the latter case, they may constitute a face-saving form of development aid.

At the level of individual librarians and information workers, there is a range of international activities, including professional travel, attendance at international conferences, studying and working abroad, volunteering for a stint in the US Peace Corps or charitable work in developing countries, or, closer to home, bibliographic and information services in area studies and global studies collections.

Before proceeding to the global dimension I note that Figure 2-D can easily be adapted for use in illustrating comparisons between countries. More about this later.

The global dimension

Having looked rather narrowly at library and information relations between countries, we need to expand our exploration to issues of a more global nature. In FIGURE 2-E the relationships set out in Figure 2-D are placed in a broader, global context.

Figure 2-E: Library and information relations in a global context

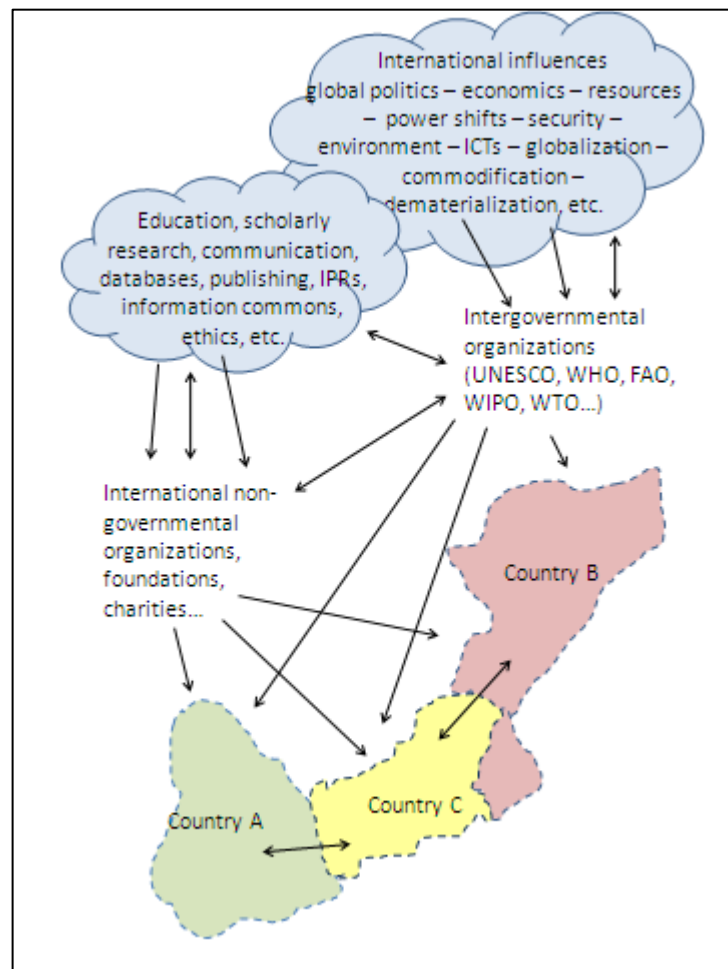


Figure 2-E suggests that, at the global level, there is a chain of interwoven factors that influence the library systems of individual

countries. The entities referred to as countries need to be problematized in light of the inter-societal processes and trans-societal structures referred to by Schriever (2006:321-324). To some extent this is reflected in this diagram. At the highest level (the cloud at top right in Figure 2-E) there are issues of global politics and economics: the regional and global deployment and exercise of political influence and military and economic power, shifts in power relationships over time, migration, competition for resources such as petroleum and fresh water, food security, and the combating of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and global warming. Technological innovations can shift the economic and political balance: for example genetically modified crops, solar energy, and the extraction of oil from very deep off-shore wells or from shale. In our context attention is focused very much on the impact of the very rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Modern ICTs make it possible for banks in the USA or Western Europe to contract out call centers to companies in developing countries, such as India, with concomitant shifts in employment opportunities and demands on the national education systems. The ICT infrastructure allows scientists in several countries across the globe to cooperate in complex research projects. It allows multinational corporations to coordinate operations in plants in many different countries. It also allows civil society organizations to organize and advocate globally. The major trends of dematerialization, globalization and commodification that were described in Chapter 1 are relevant here.

Global trends at the highest level have what we might call second order global effects of more direct consequence for librarianship and information work. They include trends in education, scholarly research and communication, including databases and scholarly publication in general. Here intellectual property rights are a significant factor, along with issues of fairness and ethics. An example is resistance to barriers affecting access to knowledge and to the ‘enclosure of the information commons’, as in the A2K (access to knowledge) and open access movements.

On the global stage there is a large and diverse cast of players. They include national governments, regional groupings of various kinds, multinational corporations, commodity cartels, and two types of organizations that are of particular interest in our context: intergovernmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations. Intergovernmental organizations include the United Nations and its “family” of organizations linked to it in various ways, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agricultural Organizations (FAO). There are also many such bodies which are not part of the UN family. Each has a particular sphere of operation within which it attempts to foster international cooperation, promote and coordinate development, and resolve (or paper over) conflicts. Some of these are more directly relevant to librarianship and information work than others. Examples are the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Both exercise a significant influence on the laws and treaties which govern intellectual property; incorporated into national laws and regulations these have a direct impact on the work of librarians and information workers world-wide. Intergovernmental organizations feature in later chapters.

International non-governmental organizations form part of what is known as “civil society”. In recent years civil society organizations have greatly increased their influence in international relations, particularly in the context of international summit conferences organized by the United Nations and its related organizations, for example the World Summit on the Information Society. International non-governmental organizations feature in later chapters.

In this discussion we have moved quite far beyond strictly library matters to more general information relations and issues of the international political economy of information. These issues include the flow of information in various forms between groups of countries, barriers to such flows and fairness in access to information and

knowledge. The emphasis is often on relations between the countries of the North (shorthand for developed countries, regardless of the hemisphere in which they are) and the South (shorthand for developing countries). These are sometimes seen as relations between rich and poor, across the digital divide, but the reality is more complex. We need to consider not only information flows from North to South (information for development) but also information flows from South to North (enriching the materially wealthy with cultural diversity and biodiversity), from South to South (self-help) and from North to North (since the North is by no means homogeneous). Intellectual property issues feature prominently. Asymmetries of political and economic power underlie the problematic relationships that are exemplified by biopiracy and the unfair exploitation of indigenous knowledge.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented definitions of national and comparative librarianship and outlined the distinction between them. In the last two sections of this chapter I have followed a systems approach in first presenting a hypothetical national library system, and then looking at the relations between such national systems and at the global trends affecting national systems. Thus international studies in librarianship and information work encompass two broad areas: relations between library institutions, groups and individuals in different countries, as depicted in Figure 2-D, and the global influences, trends, movements and supranational organizations that affect libraries and information agencies, depicted in Figure 2-E. The diagrams presented in this section are also relevant to comparative librarianship, which will be addressed more specifically in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

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