Chapter 1

Setting the Scene

Libraries are an international phenomenon. Indeed, like schools and banks we find them in every country. But libraries are not merely international in that sense. They are international in their fundamental purpose, which is to acquire, and facilitate access to, recorded knowledge regardless of its origin. Libraries are the proverbial window on the world, opening up horizons beyond the communities which sustain them, and beyond the borders of the countries where they are located. Libraries are international in a third sense: from an early stage in their development they have been engaged in international intellectual intercourse.[1]

In a recent, much-cited book, Matt Ridley (2010) has extolled the human capacity for innovation as the answer to the many threats to our survival on this planet. He argues that the exchange of ideas, to which he refers provocatively as 'ideas having sex',[2] is critical to progress. While Ridley's thoroughgoing faith in the markets in goods, services and ideas may be questioned, librarians can wholeheartedly support the notion that the exchange of ideas is critical to human survival and development. Libraries have for millennia been instrumental in the exchange of ideas between nations and cultures.

Origins of international librarianship

Early manifestations

Although it may be anachronistic to use the term "international" in this context, it is in the story of the great Hellenistic libraries of Alexandria and Pergamon that we can perceive the beginnings of the international dimension of our profession. Whilst the Ptolemies of Egypt were not the first rulers to collect and translate books in many languages "as tools of commercial and political intelligence and cultural information", the Library of Alexandria, founded in the reign of Ptolemy I Soter in the 3ʳᵈ century BCE, was "unique in scope and scale… the first to underwrite a

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[1] In this chapter 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) and on a paper I delivered at the 2009 Stelline Conference in Milan, subsequently published in *Biblioteche oggi* (Lor 2009).

[2] " …at some point in human history, ideas began to meet and mate, to have sex with one another." (p.6). A video of Ridley expounding this belief can be viewed at http://www.ted.com/talks/matt_ridley_when_ideas_have_sex.html.

programme of cultural imperialism" (MacLeod 2000:2-3). The Library aggressively collected books from beyond its country's borders, and Galen recounted that the Pharao's customs officials confiscated books from ships entering the harbor, copied them and returned the copies to the ships, whilst keeping the originals (MacLeod 2000). The Library at Alexandria was engaged in rivalry with the library of the King of Pergamon If the story is to be believed, this led to an early example of bibliographic trade sanctions, when the Ptolemies forbade the export of papyrus to Pergamon, forcing the Pergamenes to start using the substance we now know as parchment (Staikos 2005:254).

The fine editions of the ancient Greek philosophers that were printed in the European Renaissance were made possible by the Byzantines and the Arabs, who preserved, studied and copied the ancient Greek works in their libraries after the Western Roman Empire had disintegrated. Were it not for the Arabs, who established great centers of learning throughout the Arab world – as far afield as Timbuktu – much of our classical heritage would have been lost (Lerner 1998). Knowledge is international. Libraries worthy of their name do not limit themselves to books from their own city or their own country.

An interesting example comes from 19th century South Africa and New Zealand. The same British colonial administrator, Sir George Grey, served as governor of New Zealand (1845-1853 and 1861-1868) and of the Cape Colony (1854-1861). He took a great interest in philology and amassed a considerable collection of early books and pamphlets dealing with the indigenous languages of Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania – vocabularies, grammars, translations of catechisms, hymns and gospels, mostly produced by missionaries. Through a combination of generosity and accident, these materials are now held in the National Library of South Africa, in Cape Town, and in the Auckland Public Library, in New Zealand, but although legislation was passed to permit the exchange of materials, South Africa's national library still holds significant Maori and Polynesian materials. It is interesting to note that, in addition, these two outposts of the British Empire acquired some medieval manuscripts

and some incunabula from Sir George Grey (Kerr 2006).

The Nineteenth Century

Although it was in the twentieth century that interest in international librarianship took on the many forms that we know today, the origins of formal international relations among librarians go back to the nineteenth century. Formal arrangements for the exchange of publications between universities in Germany and France developed in the first half of the 19th century. These mainly concerned the exchange of dissertations. The *Akademische Tauschverein* (academic exchange association), established at the University of Marburg in 1817, soon gained member institutions outside Germany. An *Agence centrale des échanges internationaux* (center for international exchanges) was set up by Alexandre Vattemare in Paris in or around 1832 but did not survive its founder's death in 1864. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Smithsonian Institution (founded in 1846) embarked on a large-scale international program for the exchange of government publications (Krüss 1961).

The first national meeting of librarians took place concurrently with the second World's Fair, held in New York in 1853 in imitation of the first World's Fair, which had taken place in London's Crystal Palace in1851. This first 'national convention of librarians' in the United States attracted some international interest, if not attendance. It was followed by a second meeting at the second World's Fair held in the United States, the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. On this occasion the American Library Association (ALA) was founded (Gambee 1968). The British followed the American example in the following year, when the (British) Library Association was founded at the First International Congress of Librarians, in which librarians from a number of countries participated. Further international congresses and conferences followed. The Second International Congress of Librarians took place in London in 1897. It was a joint congress of British and

American librarians, but there were participants from nine other countries. Cooperation between British and American libraries in matters of cataloging was a major point for discussion (Krüss 1961).

In 1895 Henri la Fontaine and Paul Otlet founded the *Institut international de bibliographie* (International Institute of Bibliography, IIB) in Brussels with support from the Belgian government. The aim of the IIB was the construction of an index to the scholarly literature of the entire world. In the 1960s, this ideal was revived in a decentralized program of 'universal bibliographic control', about which more later. The IIB adapted Melvil Dewey's *Decimal classification* for its universal index, thereby creating the *Universal decimal classification*, which is still in use today. The IIB gave rise to the *Fédération international de documentation* (FID, International Federation for Documentation), later renamed International Federation for Information and Documentation. For over 100 years it played a major role as the international forum for documentalists and librarians in research libraries and special libraries, before being dissolved in 2002.

The early Twentieth Century

The American and British library associations engaged in international activities at an early stage. In 1905 the ALA established a Committee on International Relations (Krüss 1961). Initially international activities mainly took the form of representation at each other's conferences and at those of other national associations, but in the first decade of the twentieth century cooperation between the USA and the United Kingdom was manifested more concretely in the adoption of the Anglo-American cataloging rules of 1908 (Munford 1976).

What has been described so far can be considered to be the early history of international librarianship. The period between the two world wars can be seen as a transitional period. A significant development was the founding in 1927 of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), later renamed International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, with the retention of its original acronym. The birth of IFLA was itself the result of a series of international and national meetings, which were followed by several others before the new organization took shape and adopted its name in Italy in 1929 (Wieder 1977). IFLA was founded in close association with the League of Nations and its International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation, the forerunner of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). IFLA leaders participated in the Commission's work in matters such as reduced postal rates for libraries and the promotion of statutory legal deposit in member countries. Two major achievements of IFLA during this period reflect concerns that are still relevant today: an agreement reached in 1934 with German publishers to reduce the prices of scientific periodicals, and the development of forms and standards for international inter-library loan (Wieder 1977). Following the tragedy of the First World War, the early leaders of IFLA were inspired by ideals of world-wide peace and co-operation (Wieder & Campbell 2002). During the inter-war period IFLA grew slowly but steadily, but the outbreak of the Second World War put an end to international library work. In the magisterial *Handbuch der Bibliothekswissenschaft*, founded by Fritz Milkau before the war, and revised subsequently under the direction of Georg Leyh, there are detailed and well-documented accounts of the history of the organizations involved in international librarianship up to the inter-war years (Krüss 1961) and into the 1950s (Breycha-Vauthier 1961). In later chapters we will look more closely at IFLA, UNESCO and other organizations and initiatives.

After the Second World War: a formative period

The end of the Second World War, like the end of the First World War, was followed by a period in which relief that peace had returned was accompanied by shame and revulsion, and by a renewed determination that this should never be allowed to happen again. During this period the

United Nations came into being, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, and UNESCO was founded as the successor to the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation, with a founding ideal as stated in the Preamble to its constitution: "[S]ince wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO 1945). In 1947 IFLA met again in Oslo after a period of dormancy, in which, it is true, it had played a modest role in a Red Cross program to deliver books to prisoners of war (Breycha-Vuathier 1961). Under the leadership of its post-war Norwegian president, Wilhelm Munthe, IFLA reached out to the German colleagues, whose newly established library associations were readmitted in 1949. During most of the immediate post-war period the IFLA leadership engaged in careful diplomacy in bridging the Cold War divide by maintaining cordial relations with colleagues behind the 'Iron Curtain', despite the icy relations between their governments (Davis 2001).

In the first decades following World War II UNESCO exercised a strong influence on library development worldwide. The post-war emergence of independent states in Asia and Africa aroused much interest among internationally-minded librarians (Asheim 1966) and gave rise to idealistic and ambitious plans for developing national library services. The work of foreign cultural and aid agencies, for example the work of the British Council in developing national library services in former British colonies (discussed in Chapter 7) was applauded at the time, but has since been re-evaluated more critically. UNESCO's own work in library development in the developing world emphasized the importance of libraries for education. More fundamentally, UNESCO promoted the adoption of national information policies in these countries: primarily the UNISIST (World Science Information System) and NATIS (National Information Systems) programs (Parker 1974; Havard-Williams 1972). UNESCO also promoted the international exchange of publications, which was a significant activity for countries lacking foreign exchange and played an important role as a partner and sponsor of IFLA programs. This period saw the development of specialized international indexing and abstracting services such as MEDLARS (for medicine), AGRIS (for agriculture) and INIS (for nuclear science and technology).

Throughout the post-war period, and particularly from the late 1960s, when IFLA adopted deliberate policies of reaching out to a potential membership outside Europe and North America, IFLA played a leading role in international librarianship (Campbell 2001). IFLA's work in international library cooperation, especially its programs of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) and Universal Access to Publications (UAP) were promoted in its publications and in the writings of leaders such as Maurice B. Line, who wrote dozens of articles promoting UAP. As part of this program, an Office for UAP was set up in the British Library Lending Division at Boston Spa. The Office provided an infrastructure for efficient international inter-library loan and document supply, inter alia by the introduction (in 1995) of international inter-library lending vouchers – a system which still exists and is today operated by IFLA. The British Library Lending Division itself became a major international supplier, while in various other countries national institutions such as the *Technische Universitätsbibliothek Hannover* in Germany, and the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) took on an international document supply role as well. National libraries adopted an increasingly international outlook, serving as national centers for international lending and for universal bibliographic control. The Conference of Directors of National Libraries (CDNL) was founded in 1974 (Scott 1995).

As information and communication technology developed in the 1970s and 1980s "library cooperation on an international scale" (Havard-Williams 1972:172) became increasingly feasible, and the early notions of cooperation were progressively extended to resource sharing and networking. The MARC format, developed in the USA, soon became an international standardization phenomenon, generating national variants and international cooperation in the development of library catalogs, union catalogs and national bibliographies. This also stimulated international cooperation in respect of cataloging rules, standards such

as the international standard bibliographic descriptions (ISBDs), and the fundamental principles of cataloging, as expressed more recently in the *Functional requirements for bibliographic records* (FRBR) and related principles for authority records (Bianchini & Guerrini 2009).

Other international non-governmental organizations have also provided forums for international cooperation, discussion and reflection. Beginning in the 1950s various specialized international associations such as IAML (International Association of Music Libraries) and IBBY (the International Board on Books for Young People) were established, and they have been followed by ever more specialized bodies, such as the International Society for Knowledge Organization (ISKO). There has also been an increase in regional[3] bodies such as ACURIL (Association of Caribbean Research, University and Institutional Libraries), CONSAL (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians) and SCECSAL (Standing Conference of East, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations). The growth of international associations has been attributed to greater international awareness following the Second World War, as well as to the advent of regular, affordable air transportation (Harrison 1989) – it was no longer necessary for delegates to spend a week or more on board an ocean liner to attend an international conference.

In the 1980s and 1990s there was increasing emphasis on the impact of information for development (Stone 1993). In a significant number of developing countries well-intentioned, western-inspired library development programs had begun to falter. Starting in the 1970s a critical re-evaluation of these post-colonial efforts, sometimes referred to as "cultural imperialism" (Foskett 1976:7), got under way, as is described, for example, in contributions by Briquet de Lemos (1981), a

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[3] Whilst in many countries the terms 'region' and 'regional' refer to regions within countries, in international usage ('UN-speak') these terms mostly refer to supranational regions such as continents or groupings, e.g. Latin America and the Caribbean.

Brazilian librarian, by younger African librarians such as Adolphe Amadi (1981) and Kingo Mchombu (1982) and in seminal works such as Gassol de Horowitz's *Librarianship: a third world perspective* (1988) and *The quiet struggle: information and libraries for the people of Africa,* by Sturges and Neil (1990).

In spite of the critical questions, a number of governmental aid agencies, particularly those of the USA, Canada, Great Britain and the Nordic countries, have continued to play a significant role in supporting library development in the developing countries, as have a number of foundations such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the USA, and the Open Society Institute in Europe. These donors increasingly emphasize accountability and the sustainability of projects. This has stimulated programs aimed at capacity building by providing training opportunities for future leaders of the library profession in developing countries. Examples of such programs are those of the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Goethe Institut (Germany). Another is the Jay Jordan IFLA/OCLC Early Career Fellowship program of OCLC in partnership with IFLA.

I have barely touched upon the variety of international activities in which librarians were engaged as the end of the twentieth century approached. Today matters such as bibliographic standardization, document supply, exchange of publications, joint publication, preservation and digitization projects, restitution or repatriation of stolen or looted materials, responding to natural or man-made disasters in other countries, collection development and services in area studies, all at the international level, are part and parcel of the normal activities of many libraries world-wide, certainly of larger libraries. Attendance at international conferences, study abroad, job exchanges, working in foreign libraries, etc., offer networking and career development opportunities for many individual librarians, particularly younger colleagues. But new challenges await us.

Aspirations and motivations[4]

As the various international activities increased in the course of the 20th century, the amount of literature devoted to the topic grew as well. In the literature the rationales for those advocating for, reporting on, and studying international and comparative librarianship evolved over time. The basis for the list of motivations that follows was laid by Carroll (1970) in a dissertation on internationalism in library education, in which she identified six goals of international content in US library school curricula. Rayward (1979) provided a critical overview of the literature of international librarianship. In it he identified a number of categories not of motives but of literature. Some of these are also referred to here. The following are, roughly in order of sophistication, what appear to have been the motives of authors who have contributed to what is broadly known as international and comparative librarianship:

- Exoticism
- Philanthropy
- Missionary zeal
- Extending national influence
- International understanding
- Internationalism
- Area studies
- Co-operation
- Innovation
- Advancing knowledge
- Self-understanding

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[4] This section has been adapted from an article published in Mousaion in 2008 (Lor 2008a) .

Exoticism, philanthropy and missionary zeal

The first cluster of motives can be placed under the label of *exoticism*. It includes curiosity about how things are done in foreign countries, a love of travel and adventure, and the prestige that comes from having been where others have not. Rayward (1979) categorizes works that arises from this motive as 'travelogues'. Writings motivated by exoticism tend to be anecdotal and descriptive.

In this context it is of interest to note the somewhat more elaborate and also more insightful classification of approaches to foreign cultures of colonialists outlined by Amartya Sen (2005) in his book *The argumentative Indian*. Sen wrote about British colonial attitudes to Indian culture over the three centuries or so that the British expanded their influence over that subcontinent and ruled over it. He distinguished between curatorial, magisterial and exoticist approaches in roughly successive periods. I will return to Sen's categories in Chapter 7, but here I note that in the third phase, Sen depicts the "fragile enthusiasm" of exoticism, exemplified by the late 20th century westerners who travelled to India to "find" themselves. Here it is interesting to consider also the attitude of western scholars to eastern cultures as critiqued by Edward Said (1978) in his influential book, *Orientalism*. Orientalism, according to Said, purveyed a misleading and romanticized image of the East, particularly of Arab culture.

The second motive is *philanthropy*, love of our fellow humans. Here we find accounts by librarians and students who have travelled to other countries to assist in library development there. Accounts of their experiences also tend to be anecdotal and descriptive, with occasional analytical and evaluative elements.

Somewhere in between philanthropy and the next motive is what one might call *missionary zeal*. This is manifested in an article by Swank (1963) who identified "six items for export", namely characteristics of American librarianship that he considered deserving of emulation in

other countries, for example the evolution of the library profession, the attitude of service, and the role of the library in promoting intellectual freedom. Swank particularly envisaged "exporting" these concepts to developing countries. Two decades later Lester Asheim (1985) revisited this theme in a more nuanced and self-critical frame of mind.

Extending national influence

Often interwoven with the previous two motives is, fourth, *extending national influence* (cultural, economic or political) through foreign aid for library development. The work of the British Council, the United States Department of State (formerly carried out by the United States Information Services, USIS) or Germany's Goethe Institut in providing library and information services and in stimulating and assisting the development of libraries in many countries, comes to mind. For a critique of USIS libraries in the 1960s see Asheim (1966). Such activities are not entirely altruistic, the intention being to extend or strengthen the influence of the country providing the assistance. Accounts in this genre tend to be descriptive or promotional, but insufficiently evaluative. Among the goals she distinguished in a detailed analysis of the goals of international librarianship in US library schools, Frances Laverne Carroll (1970:43-55) identified two that are relevant here:

- To advance the objectives of US foreign policy (including the combating of communism and the strengthening of relations with the allies of the USA)
- To promote international understanding and appreciation of the United States

Carroll's analysis highlights some of the ambivalence inherent in international studies, particularly at the height of the Cold War. Some goals are clearly subordinated to national policy interests. Others too, may not be as altruistic or idealistic as they look.

International understanding

One of the major goals that Carroll identified was *international understanding*, where she identified three dimensions:

- Attitude (an affective dimension concerned with feelings of friendliness and willingness to co-operate)
- Knowledge (a cognitive dimension concerned with understanding the behavior of other people)
- Strategic knowledge (another cognitive dimension concerned with understanding the intentions of others with a view to decision-making, e.g. in foreign policy)

The promotion of positive attitudes, friendship and cooperativeness in the library sphere, and understanding the behavior of librarians in other countries are laudable motives, although the last of the three dimensions cited here suggests that exerting national influence is also a motive in seeking international understanding. It would be uncharitable, however, to ascribe all this to selfish (national) motives. Regardless of the motives of politicians and administrators who recruit them, many library professionals give unselfishly of their time and energy in the belief that they are contributing to international understanding. It is interesting to note that an idealistic striving to promote world peace was also evident in comparative education between the two world wars (Hayhoe & Mundy 2008).

Internationalism

In the context of international librarianship, and especially in the context of international library co-operation, *internationalism* frequently features as a shared value. Here it refers to an idealistic motive: librarians engaged in international co-operation are described by K.C.

Harrison (1989:xv) as "citizens of the world with a strong faith that what they are supporting is really worthwhile and that both short-term and long-term good will come from it". Internationalism in this sense is an attitude in favor of international cooperation and is difficult to distinguish from the motive of international understanding. But the word 'internationalism' is also used to denote a more general international orientation and awareness. Thus internationalism can be summed up as an 'internationally minded' orientation. The word 'internationalism" is often used to refer to *internationalization*. In the USA 'internationalism' has had a strong protagonist in Carroll, who devoted much research to the internationalization of library and information science education. Internationalization was defined by Carroll and Harvey (1987:x) as "…the process by which a nationalistic library school topic, an entire curriculum, or an entire school is changed into one with a significant and varied international thrust, the process whereby it is permeated with international policies, viewpoints, ideas and facts".

Operational needs

I have inserted here the motive reflected in the "operational or pragmatic" literature to which Rayward (1979:225) refers as 'area studies':

> How to obtain what kinds of materials for what purposes from what regions of the world and with what institutional consequences is frequently the complex but practical question to which this literature is addressed.

Much of this literature consists of proceedings of conferences and other meetings concerned with acquiring foreign materials for US libraries or libraries in other developed countries, with an emphasis on materials emanating from developing regions. Rayward includes here the literature on international systems of bibliographic control and availability of publications, which I have placed in the next category.

Cooperation

Librarians have a long and honorable tradition of *cooperation*. Peter Havard-Williams went so far as to make cooperation the central theme of international librarianship. He wrote: "I define international librarianship as co-operative activity in the field of librarianship done for the benefit of the individual librarian in the whole of the world, and done frequently by the likes of you and me" (Havard-Williams, 1972:170). International cooperation in respect of document supply, bibliographic standards, preservation and other technical areas, where Rayward's (1979:231) category of "operational literature" may be found, will undoubtedly remain an important motivation. But given rapid developments in information and communications technologies and the accompanying phenomena of globalization and disintermediation, efficient cooperation among librarians worldwide is needed for the profession to participate effectively in the global forums. These are forums such as the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), where far-reaching decisions are made that affect free and fair access to information resources in libraries serving the peoples of the world (cf. Schleihagen 2004).

Innovation

Another motive is *innovation*. As K. C. Harrison (1989:xii) has put it: "…librarians with weather-eyes on professional practices in other countries have been able to adopt, adapt and apply many of these to their own library situations." Such transplanting has occurred particularly in technical library processes. This has led to writings of a technical and evaluative nature. In tracing the origins of comparative librarianship, Krzys and Litton (1982) traced this motive back to classical antiquity, but possibly they were confusing the comparison of library techniques and processes with comparative librarianship as a systematic and scholarly activity. For her part, Collings (1971) traces

comparative librarianship back to Gabriel Naudé, whose 1627 book *Avis pour dresser une bibliothèque* is one of the classic texts of librarianship.

In the introduction to a new column, "International perspectives on academic libraries" in the *Journal of academic librarianship*, the editors of the column, Rowena Cullen and Philip J Calvert, wrote:

> It is hoped that this column will help broaden the journal's perspective outside North America; raise issues faced by academic librarians in the developing as well as the developed world; and identify issues that are common to all academic libraries, but to which the solutions must sometimes be modified to suit particular countries, cultures or economic environments. It should also be remembered that, although North American academic libraries are the driving force behind much innovation in the LIS field and are the source of much new thinking in the discipline, librarians in other countries have sometimes to deal with certain issues before they become critical in the United States or Canada; hence there will be times that the flow of information will travel in the other direction (Cullen & Calvert, 2001:394).

Although this statement strikes the non-North American reader as somewhat parochial if not self-satisfied, the recognition that the traffic of ideas and innovation can be two-way, is worth noting. A pragmatic desire to learn from other countries and 'borrow', adopt or adapt technologies, systems, or policies found there, has been a significant motivator for comparative librarianship. In the second of three essays on comparative librarianship submitted for the (British) Library Association's Sevensma Prize in 1971, R.K. Gupta (1973:44) emphasized that the "higher end" of comparative librarianships is to

> ...act as a tool in determining the suitability of borrowing meaningfully the patterns under study *in toto* or partially. The main strength of the comparative librarianship approach, therefore, lies in its ability to lay bare the suitability/adaptability or otherwise of a library pattern or

technique under study. The realm of comparative librarianship is not theory but application...

The motive of 'borrowing' ideas and policies occurs not only in LIS but in many other disciplines, such as education (Altbach & Kelly 1986:3-5; Hayhoe & Mundy 2008:9) and social policy (Hantrais 2009:9-11), but is not without risks, as will be considered in Chapter 7.

Advancing knowledge

The quest for *advancing knowledge* includes description, analysis, classification and comparison in order to arrive at generalized statements that explain phenomena and yield greater understanding. In his Foreword to Harrison's *International librarianship* (Harrison, 1989), Lester Asheim (1989:vii) pointed to the value of

> …learning-through-participation… not only through actual practice as a librarian in some other country, but also through the mutual exchange of ideas and viewpoints made possible through international associations… Both of these… provide the librarian with the opportunity to have direct contact with the practice and philosophy of library service in varying circumstances and at different levels of societal development, and from this insight, to identify and appreciate the many factors outside of librarianship itself that shape and define the nature of a library's services and its social role.

This suggests that international comparisons can provide insights that are less readily gained from the study of library conditions in a single country. It is a point quite frequently made in the literature of comparative as well as international librarianship. Collings (1970:493) stated that "the basic purpose of comparative librarianship as a subject of scholarly concern is to seek full understanding and correct interpretation of the library system or problem under review"; however, she mainly emphasized "pragmatic goals" such as providing guidelines

for adopting programs from or in other countries. In their book, *World librarianship: a comparative study*, Krzys and Litton (1983:5) cited the purely scientific objective of "formulating hypotheses, theories, and laws that will explain, predict, and control the phenomenon [under investigation]". Their expectation was that the diverse national practices found in librarianship throughout the world would ultimately converge into a "global librarianship" (p.vii). Their book was intended to advance this evolution. The assumption that such a global homogenisation is desirable is, however, open to question.

A different angle is suggested by Volodin (1998). In an article on the development of scholarly libraries in Russia, he describes the evolution of Russian scholarly libraries during the Soviet period, making some interesting points about difficulties of understanding these libraries from a Western perspective:

> An accurate description of the processes which influence the development of libraries in contemporary Russia in the context of the development of library science globally would allow us to understand why this country reacts differently to the same problems of research library development existing in other countries. A deeper understanding of the domestic situation might help illuminate connections between political order and cultural tradition. At the threshold of the new century the problems faced today by our colleagues around the world are similar. But different societies respond differently to the same challenges. Underestimation or ignorance of these processes cripples attempts at international cooperation (p.125).

Here an important interaction between studies at the national and international levels is suggested. We can make more sense of the way situations develop in individual countries if we can see them in a global context – but the suggestion is that understanding of the global context derives from studies of librarianship within the political and cultural context of individual countries.

Self-understanding

Asheim (1989) listed a number of factors outside of librarianship that determine who uses libraries, how and why, and what barriers inhibit their use. Such factors operate everywhere, "…but somehow we can see and understand this much more clearly in a foreign setting than we can when we are looking at a phenomenon with which we feel comfortably 'at home'"(p. viii). What is significant about this motive is that it is concerned with *self-understanding*, which represents considerable progress from the starting point of exoticism. This is also reflected in the last of Carroll's (1970) minor goals: "to gain perspective on one's own values and traditions". It can be said that self-understanding, achieved by seeing the self in relation to others, is the ultimate goal of travel.

In the broader context of comparative social policy, Jones (1985:3-4) considered comparative studies as a necessity, since "it provides a better understanding of the home social policy environment", and added that the increasing use of international comparisons for political purposes makes it incumbent on professionals to understand and comment on such situations. Forearmed is forewarned.

Beyond library walls: 21st century challenges

As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, it is abundantly clear that librarians and information workers need to adopt a wider perspective than ever before, and to develop an on-going awareness of the 'megatrends'[5] that affect the profession in our time. On the international scene there are vast changes in political and economic relations. There are complex problems relating to the environment,

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[5] The term "megatrends' was coined by John Naisbitt in his 1982 book *Megatrends: ten new directions transforming our lives*. Here I am using the term in a generic sense. I am not referring specifically to any of the ten megatrends that Naisbitt identified .

competition for resources, international migration, multiculturalism, social justice, religious fundamentalism, and wars and global terrorism. Here my focus is on three trends that are particularly relevant to what has been referred to as the information society, the knowledge society, or the information economy. Modern information and communications technologies (ICTs) are bringing about a profound transformation in the information and knowledge landscape, affecting the creation, distribution, dissemination and repackaging of information as well as the interactive sharing of knowledge. Modern ICTs allow information to be carried swiftly and unobtrusively across national boundaries, but while information can flow faster and more freely, it is also recognized as the raw material for the new economy, as a key resource for competitiveness, and as a valuable asset for those who own and can control it. Thus the information economy is characterized by a number of trends of particular relevance to our profession, of which I highlight the following three:

- Dematerialization
- Globalization
- Commodification

Dematerialization

By allowing information to be unbundled from its original physical carriers, modern ICTs bring about a shift from the economics of things to the economics of information.

> When information is carried by things – by a salesperson or by a piece of direct mail, for example – it goes where the things go and no further. It is constrained to follow the linear flow of the physical value chain. But once anyone is connected electronically information can travel by itself…what is truly revolutionary about the explosion in connectivity is the possibility it offers to unbundle information from its physical carrier" (Evans & Wurster 1997:73).

This has made possible what Clarke (2003:1) has called a weightless and dematerialized economy. A somewhat frightening example of dematerialization is the world-wide economic crisis that originated in problems in the US sub-prime mortgage market when US house prices peaked in mid-2006. American banks had been giving large loans to home-buyers who had little or no chance of repaying them. Bonds were repackaged and sold on to other financial institutions and new financial instruments called special investment vehicles (SIVs) were devised (Robinson 2007). These dematerialized assets were essentially information transmitted from computer to computer in worldwide networks, flowing around the world and ultimately affecting institutions and individuals who had no inkling that they were exposed to the risks of sub-prime mortgage loans in Stockton, California or Cleveland, Ohio. They also triggered the collapse of many other financial institutions whose stability relied on a combination of dematerialized assets and confidence.

Dematerialization affects libraries more directly. Personal diaries and photo albums are being replaced by ephemeral virtual equivalents on the Internet, for example using social media. A great deal of this content, which reflects currents and movements in society, is at risk. Web content is ephemeral. It can be moved from one server to another, and from one country or another, with a few clicks of a mouse. Hence international approaches are needed to ensure its preservation. Turning our attention to more traditional content we note that, like investment bankers, librarians have been investing heavily in dematerialized assets. Increasingly libraries are replacing print-on-paper journal subscriptions and the acquisition of printed books by the signing of licensing deals. These deals involve dematerialized information, the right to access content in the form of streams of electrons, for display on computer screens. The management of digital resources, and especially digital preservation, are major challenges to our profession internationally. And the problem really is international, since the notion of a place of publication, a cornerstone of universal bibliographic control and

universal availability of publications, has become problematic.

Dematerialization of library collections is not restricted to scholarly, technical and reference material. In July 2010 it was reported by Amazon.com that its sales of hardcover books have been overtaken by sales of e-books for the Kindle e-book reader (Miller 2010). In a recent post on the Thingology blog Tim Spalding (2010) took up a story by Mike Shatzkin (2010) on the impending demise of bookstores and applied this to libraries. Shatzkin foresees the demise of bookstores for the same reason that we are seeing the demise of CD and DVD stores: just like music and video clips, books will be sold virtually on the Internet, as e-books. People will download them online, either for payment or as pirated copies. People will no longer come to libraries in large numbers to borrow books. Increasingly the question is voiced: will libraries still be needed now that "everything is available on the Internet". The question persists in spite of spirited and intelligent responses, such as a recent statement by Mary Dempsey (2010), Public Library Commissioner of the City of Chicago. News media regularly cover stories of conventional school or college libraries being phased out or replaced by virtual libraries (e.g. Abel 2009), the physical books and journals being replaced by networked electronic resources. To embattled administrators in poor countries and communities this may look like a good idea. Yet even in wealthy countries and communities, not everyone has Internet access; by no means all materials on the Internet can be accessed free of charge, and libraries do much more than dispensing access to information. Sole reliance on the Internet holds the risk of increasing dependence on multinational media corporations, eroding cultural diversity, impoverishing communities intellectually and spiritually, isolating marginalized groups, and widening the gap between rich and poor. This is a world-wide problem. Librarians need to work together internationally to advocate for the recognition of libraries as central to the information/ knowledge society, and as agencies of social inclusion.

Globalization

It has been said that the Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602, was the world's first multinational corporation (Wikipedia 2008). Since World War II a number of factors have accelerated globalization. They include the creation of institutions to improve worldwide economic stability, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, mechanisms to lower barriers to international trade, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and various multilateral and bilateral trade agreements. Also significant are improvements in international transport and communications – especially modern information and communication technologies (ICTs). Globalization may not be new, but modern ICTs, and especially the Internet, have dramatically speeded up the process.

Globalization is not an exclusively economic phenomenon. It has wide-ranging social and cultural ramifications, and its impact is debatable. Supporters of globalization point to benefits such as more rapid economic growth, improvements in living standards and the peaceful resolution of international political and economic tension. But these benefits are not evident everywhere. They are said to accrue to countries that "engage well with the international economy" (Global education 2007). Countries that do not "engage well", whether for ideological reasons or because of economic or geographic handicaps that prevent them from taking advantage of globalization, tend to get left behind. This is emphasized by a broad anti-globalist or 'mundialist' movement that has come into prominence as a result of large and sometimes violent demonstrations at world economic summits. They cite a range of problems attributed to globalization, for example the heavy social and economic costs of economic restructuring required to be competitive in the world market, a growing gap in the standard of living between richest and poorest countries, environmental damage, and the erosion of national cultures and languages (Global education 2007).

For librarians and information workers in developing countries

globalization brings problems that are less widely known. These concern the flow of scholarly information between the developed and developing world, referred to here for convenience as the North and the South respectively. South-North information flows are of particular concern. These range from highly *desirable* South-North information flow – e.g. contributions by African scientists and scholars to the international scientific and scholarly literature – to *exploitative* South-North flow – e.g. the recording and subsequent commercial exploitation in developed countries of indigenous knowledge obtained from traditional communities and practitioners in African countries (Britz & Lor 2003). The impact of globalization on South-North information flows can be both positive and negative. There is a risk that weaker voices will be drowned out. At the same time countervailing forces are also able to operate globally using the infrastructure on which globalization thrives.

While the world is being pulled ever closer together by the process of globalization, there is also a counter-trend towards nationalism, particularism and fundamentalism. An unfortunate side-effect of globalization is global terrorism, which has led to greater governmental secrecy, to the invasion of privacy (for example, the privacy of library users) and the curtailment of freedom of access to information – an issue of direct concern to our profession, and one on which library associations in various parts of the world have taken a stand. The 2005 *IFLA/FAIFE world report* (Seidelin & Hamilton 2005) reported the result of a survey of libraries in 84 countries, in which questions on anti-terror legislation and its effects on libraries after September 11th, 2001 were included. Respondents in some of the countries expressed concern about newly passed legislation and its potential for "mission creep" – the possibility that police powers could be applied more broadly than the original mandate for fighting terrorism.

Globalization includes the global movement of people, bringing with it such problems as the brain drain, boat people, refugees and illegal immigrants, but also enriching us with multiple languages and diverse cultures, customs and cuisines – not to forget the challenges of library services to multicultural populations. This is international librarianship delivered to our front door.

Commodification[6]

It is generally accepted that information (or rather knowledge) is the dominant strategic resource of the information economy, comparable to land in the agricultural era and to capital in the industrial era. This means that knowledge has commercial value and gives rise to competition. It has become a commodity. This is reflected in changes taking place in publishing. Modern ICTs enable publishers to exploit a "long tail" (Anderson 2006) of content that they produced over a long period of time. Very small sales volumes can still be profitable if the content is stored and distributed digitally. This applies not only to born-digital content, but also to analogue content that is subsequently digitized. Thus the Internet makes it possible to continue exploiting the content profitably for much longer. One effect of this is the unbundling of journals. In many cases the salable unit is no longer the journal title, but the individual article. Another effect is a greater emphasis, often under the guise of combating piracy, on locking up information content – more kinds of information content, for longer periods than ever before – and dismantling the statutory limitations and exceptions that make fair use possible free of charge for scholars, students and libraries.

At the international level the commodification of information has had a profound effect on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) regimes as well as on the ability of developing nations to gain access to and benefit from information. The rich nations, more particularly the USA and the EU, have taken the lead in setting international standards to ensure that the

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[6] Both 'commodification' and 'commoditization' are found in current dictionaries. The latter appear to be gaining, but I prefer 'commodification' because the suffix, derived from Latin *facere*, to make, imparts the meaning 'to make a commodity of something'.

interests of IPR owners are better protected. There is a strong drive to ensure that their interests are also protected in the developing countries. A "carrot and stick" approach is being used to force developing countries to tighten restrictions on the use of intellectual property. The "stick" is the threat of economic sanctions, and the "carrot" is admission to free trade agreements (FTAs). In the latter case the snag is that developing countries may be required to adhere to more stringent requirements than those that apply in the internal market of the dominant partner. The result is that these developing nations fail to incorporate in their legislation all the available limitations and exceptions that are needed to open up access to knowledge for their populations (Consumers International 2006). Free trade is not necessarily fair trade.

There is also a counter-trend, a remarkable altruism, a culture of sharing, which is exemplified by the open source model of software development (Miller 2006), the Wikipedia, and last but not least, the open access movement, which has attracted much attention and wide support from many quarters, including governments, grant-making bodies, and professional organizations (Lor 2007). IFLA stated its position on open access in 2003, in its *IFLA Statement on Open Access to Scholarly Literature and Research Documentation* (IFLA, 2003). The statement affirms the importance of comprehensive open access to scholarly literature and research documentation.

Since the mid-1990s the economic, political and ethical aspects of the international flow of information, particularly between developed countries and developing countries, have emerged as an important theme. The gap between rich and poor countries is often referred to as the "digital divide". However, the divide is not merely digital, as it has significant political, legal and economic dimensions. Librarians have become increasingly aware of the impact on their institutions and users of decisions on intellectual property and related matters that are taken at international forums such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World

Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and in multilateral or bilateral trade agreements between countries (Britz, Lor & Bothma 2006; Lor 2008). In addition, issues of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression (Byrne 2007), and vexed questions of tolerance in multi-cultural environments have come to prominence at the international level as a consequence of increasing globalization (Sturges 2006).

Conclusion

It is not surprising that librarians have become increasingly engaged in international advocacy, often channeled through organizations such as IFLA, the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) and eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries). Only through cooperation and continuous monitoring is the library profession able to ensure representation at the plethora of international meetings and to keep abreast of the huge volume of documentation generated by the international organizations. Currently, most of this documentation is disseminated through the Internet. Globalization has seen to it that the international affairs relevant to library professionals have multiplied to an extent that could not have been foreseen by their predecessors. To many practicing librarians much of this may seem remote, but continuing vigilance is called for. It is therefore important to raise awareness of international issues in the profession. The expression "think globally, act locally" comes to mind. We need to be aware of what is happening around us, locally, nationally and globally. This book therefore ventures beyond the walls of the library and the scope of earlier books on international librarianship to deal also with broader issues in the political economy of information.

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