

Globalising Academic Libraries: Vision 2020 International Conference on Academic Libraries Delhi University, 5–8 October 2009

A report by Anna Jablkowska*

Day One

Although the conference appears to have started in the morning of Monday, 5 October with a pre-conference programme at the University of Delhi, we arrived in time for the conference opening ceremony in the afternoon, which consisted of several talks and a torch-lighting ceremony.

It was a large conference, with over 650 people attending, including students as well as professional and retired members of the library profession. A large percentage of the attendees were from India, and certainly much of the conference was geared towards the profession in India.

The welcome address was given by Prof. B. L. Mungekar, who spoke about the future of academic libraries and the changes that needed to be made, the challenges that faced developing countries especially, and the hope that the conference would provide ideas for steps forward.

The next address was given by S. K. Tanden (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Delhi) who spoke about knowledge asymmetry within the developing world, such as India. He also talked about the large number of post-graduate institutions that encompassed the University of Delhi and the challenge that



that provided in ensuring that knowledge was received at all the campuses and by all the half a million students. He mentioned the growth of IT, the sharing of resources and the importance of networking. Librarians need to teach others how to sift through the mountain of information wisely.

His talk was followed by one from Ellen Tise (President of IFLA) on change, transformation and partnership being the future of academic libraries. She focused on six key areas:

- 1 Academic libraries as a place for knowledge production and distribution. The librarian is a moderator and should be guiding students in the research process. The library should also develop and collect digital collections.
- 2 Exploiting the Internet efficiency of digital resources. Libraries should promote this, and ensure that everyone has access to information

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in a format which can be used as required.

3 Transformation and redeveloping of library space.

4 Partnership of both the faculty and the library should complement and strengthen each other.

5 Pedagogical shift and information literacy. Information literacy is the core for the 21st century.

6 New academic librarians must be flexible and adapt to new ideas. There is also a need to be creative and bold, redefining library spaces and breaking traditions by drastically reducing the number of hard copies in favour of digitisation.

This was followed by a talk by Deepak Pental (Vice-Chancellor, University of Delhi) who raised the issue of maintaining the bound volume in India, and the need to digitise more material.

The final speech came from Sam Piroda (Chairman of the National Knowledge Commission, India) who said that India had a long tradition of knowledge and over 2000 years of spreading Indian knowledge abroad, but that recently they have fallen behind. The Commission recommended 27 areas of concern, which have been accepted, with the result that more money is being spent on education. Another recommendation was a separate and permanent body to represent all aspects of the library service, which has also been accepted. This will now look at the modernisation of libraries with IT, and encourage private partnership.

Day Two

The morning started with a talk from David Kohl (University librarian, Cincinnati University) entitled 'Towards a New Under-

standing of the Library Mission'. Libraries have changed over the years. The digital revolution is not necessarily better, but it is a different way of doing the job. We are now using new technologies to solve old problems. Digitisation has not only become more important, it is also more global. Libraries can no longer find identity as a warehouse for books, they therefore need to change and become more of a guide and facilitator to information available. There are several key issues:

- A long goodbye to print collections, which can be seen clearly with periodicals and government documentation.
- Forming consortia, e.g. for digital materials, is better economics. This, however, is determined by the local environment and politics.
- Digitising local collections, which automatically creates three further issues: funding, technology and copyright.
- Preservation of digital records, and guarding against catastrophic loss, readability loss and loss of access.
- Actively participating in ICOLC (International Coalition of Library Consortia).¹

There is now an information glut, information is available everywhere, leading to two main issues: preparing digital material so that it can be retrieved effectively, and finding the expertise to identify useful and reliable information. This then raises the role of cataloguing: is it still required? Information costs money and we need to explore issues for sustainable funding for academic research and dialogue.

¹ <<http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia>>.



After that everyone was divided into four groups. I attended one entitled 'New Dimensions in Library Service', and later one called 'Talent Development'; both were very much geared towards Indian libraries. In the first paper, Kaplana Dasgupta talked about the dual use of public and academic libraries, stating that libraries have suffered a compartmentalisation of users and library services. The merger of two kinds of libraries would mean increased use of resources, a broader range of resources, attracting new users and making better use of staff skills. Factors which can facilitate such a merger are government support, a positive attitude between partners, and community involvement.

The main issues that need to be considered are mission statements, which need to be clear, collection development, library design, administration, staffing and annual evaluation. Such partnerships have been made between secondary schools and public libraries, and the University of Worcester (UK) is planning a merger with the public library, which is due to open 2011.² The Indian dream of an inclusive knowledge society and the right of education for all means that libraries have to show their relevance to society and their

communities. It would therefore be worthwhile for academic libraries to work with the nearest public library and merge, with advantages to both sides.

There were several other papers under the same theme. In one, the speaker recommended setting up a local information centre within the academic library and sharing this information with others. In another, S. L. Faisal talked about the advantages of blogs with Web 2.0 technology that can be both informative and a publicity tool. It enhances the visibility of the library, and can be used for chats, comments and discussions, making the library an active member of the community.

The session on 'Talent Development' comprised several papers. In the first, Mr Singh highlighted the different skills required by library professionals, with emphasis on customer needs and customer service. Ms Uma then compared the staffing structure recommended by Ranganathan to what is required today. Mr Goswami emphasised the importance of libraries being within the centre of an academic institution, but all too often seeking refuge in digital technology and under-using the hidden treasures within these resources.

The next paper highlighted the self-development and training for librarians used at the BRCM College of Business Administration.³ This was followed by a paper by Mr Chand on the importance of training, why, in the current age of digitised information, it is important to keep updated with new initiatives, and the methods through which this can be done (e.g. lectures, participation, assignments, hands-on projects, etc.).

Mr Sunitha then spoke on best practice within training, such as in-service training and student-participation programmes. The

² <<http://www.wlhc.org.uk>>.

³ <<http://brcmbba.org>>.

last paper was given by Priya Pillai, who suggested training via the use of the Web and blogs.

In the afternoon a talk was given by Mr Jay Jordan, president of OCLC, on the history of OCLC and on the Worldcat,⁴ followed by presentations from the various exhibitors or a poster presentation, entitled 'Glimpses of Indian Agricultural and Information Use'. This was followed by a panel discussion and a cultural programme of some Indian dancing.



Day 3

The day started with a talk from Carol Tenopir entitled 'Measuring the Value and Return on Investment of Academic Libraries', which related particularly to the use of e-journals and other e-resources. The main methods used are usage logs, vendor reports, surveys and interviews. Both logs and vendor reports are factual measures and have the advantage that they can be automatically generated. One may be able to see use within disciplines, but one does not learn who is using them or how they are being used, nor the purpose, satisfaction or outcome of their use.

Surveys have many purposes, depending on the type of questions. A typical survey can ask age and rank of user, subject discipline,

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_Computer_Library_Center>.

recollection of behaviour (e.g. how much have you read?), opinions and reactions (the use of journals over a period of time), how long was spent finding the item, how long was spent reading. One can also focus on a particular article and get even more information, such as why, where, and value.

It has been found that medical staff read more periodicals, whereas in the humanities more books are read. Surveys can be both qualitative and quantitative, but they have limitations – i.e. one is reliant on accuracy and truthfulness – and response rates tend to be between 10% and 35%, with students less likely to respond than academics. There is no one method, so multiple methods should be used.

Recent studies in the US have used ROI (return on investment) techniques in order to measure the library's economic value to the institution. An international team is working on this topic, in several phases of increasing complexity.

Once again we were divided into four groups. I attended a group entitled 'Visions and Roles'. The first paper was given by Hazel Woodward (Librarian, Cranfield University) entitled 'Digital Collections and Services: The Future of Academic Librarians'. She spoke about the growing number of new techno-

logies, such as Facebook, blogs, wikis, etc., and how to make use of them. As information professionals, we need to examine how to manage, provide access to and disseminate this information.

There are now more and more journals available on the Web, and these are increasingly using a large percentage of the library budget, partly owing to publishers selling their e-journals in packages, which may once have been advantageous for libraries but is now less so as cancellations are difficult.

E-books and the Espresso Book Machine⁵ are coming increasingly to the fore; many more books are now available in e-format. However, publishers are reluctant to make e-textbooks available, though that may soon change. Google has gone in partnership with major libraries and is digitising their collections. Some academic libraries are looking at their special collections and digitising them, and other works such as theses are also being digitised. Consortia have been around for a while, and new technologies have opened up new collaborations. Together, consortia belong to ICOLC, which makes them a powerful voice for libraries, and publishers will also take note of it. Student user communities are changing; many more people are now working and studying, and there is also distance learning. Research communities are also changing; more and more information is being sought.

It was noted that many people have difficulty in evaluating the quality of information available, and do not realise how much is available, demonstrating the need for information-literacy programmes. There is also a need to move away from the traditional OPACS and to make more use of Web 2.0 applications and social networking. The next



speakers talked about collaboration between universities and industries and the relationship between publishers and libraries, but again they were very much geared towards India as a developing nation.

The next session was on educational roles within academic libraries, with the principal speaker being John Dolan (Former Head of Library Policy, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, UK). The case for libraries has to be based on their use, outcome and policies. It is important to share good practice through networking and collaboration with others.

The changing environment (in places such as India, whose importance is set to increase in the 21st century) of urbanisation, climate change and health needs to be taken into consideration, as do continuous digital change and the need for a high-quality education system when planning for the future.

The value of the library is as a safe and community meeting place, providing access to resources, a place to learn new skills, inspiring enjoyment and education. The librarian now needs to acquire and select resources for a constantly changing community, work in partnership with others, plan, innovate and evaluate strategies. Advocacy is a process, a way of thinking and working through networking and friendships, building partnerships, fundraising, researching, evaluating.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Espresso_Book_Machine.

Three methods were highlighted:

1 Research and evidence. Show evidence of customer-orientated improvement and the way forward.

2 Organisation and cultural change. New ways of working, comprising strategic skills of leadership advocacy and effective management; negotiating and brokering through partnerships; technical skills and operational skills, including community profiling and market research.

3 From silos to synergy. The need to work with others, co-operating within sectors. Sharing knowledge and pooling resources. In addition to being beneficial, it is also economically justifiable.

Libraries need to change and adopt new skills, such as self-promotion; they also need to learn how to learn.

The next papers were on the need for digital repositories in academic libraries within India, and an interesting one was on a distance-learning programme set up in Thailand, in which research found and recommended that librarians should establish closer links and work with faculty members to recognise the educational roles of librarians.⁶ This was followed by a talk on doctorates in library science awarded by Indian universities, which highlighted an increasing number of doctorates and English as the main language used.

The afternoon session started with a talk by Janice Lachance (Chief Executive Officer of the Special Library Association) entitled 'Opportunities for Collaboration for Academic

libraries'. Different forms of collaboration were mentioned:

- Three universities (US) collaborated to ship material between campuses in exchange for training.
- Ohio libraries (public, school and academic libraries) have collaborated in order to share expertise and information resources.
- Consortia involving colleges, such as COPAC and M25.⁷
- New York public and academic libraries have collaborated to provide health information for all in different languages.
- In Florida there is collaboration between a museum, the public library network and a university to digitise and preserve its collections.

This was followed by a talk by Ann Okerson on the digitisation in libraries in the 21st century environment. She emphasised the importance of globalisation in the future, and the emergence of the importance of developing countries. She also thought that English would become the main world language, so librarians may well have the task of preserving communities and records of threatened languages. International organisations such as IFLA were mentioned, as was the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Access to Learning Awards.⁸

Digitisation was becoming increasingly important and there is therefore also the need to digitise our heritage collections. As more information becomes available the challenge will be getting the information you want.

In conclusion, although much of the conference was geared towards Indian libraries, the value came from the quality and interest of the various lectures given.

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukhothai_Thammathirat_Open_University>.

⁷ <<http://copac.ac.uk>>; <<http://www.m25lib.ac.uk>>.

⁸ <<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/ATLA>>.