

Challenges in assisting Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies in developing countries - a perspective from research in Latin America

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Abstract

This paper reviews traditional forms of support for developing Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences, and traditional approaches. It notes that these approaches have not been entirely successful, and that the sources of support are changing. In the light of the growth in the number of Schools in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, traditional approaches may not be practicable. Suggestions in the past have included making teaching materials available, including access over the Internet, but these may be no more appropriate or practicable. The paper then notes the emergence of electronic publishing, based on research in Latin America. Whilst noting that there are still flaws in the system, this may appear to offer a new way forward. The challenge now is to determine how to facilitate this internationally.

Introduction

In every country in the world, the pattern of development of the different kinds of library and information services has quite evidently been different as a consequence of the context in which they operate, and this has invariably impacted on the nature of professional education. In the developing countries these differences are exaggerated by the prevailing circumstances: not only less money for investment, but also a shortage of skilled labour to meet a growing need for professional services.

Since the end of World War II, the international development agencies, often with the assistance of NGOs such as IFLA, have expended significant effort in the development of national education systems in developing countries and more recently also in the Eastern European countries with economies in transition from a socialist model to a free market. From its establishment in 1973, the IFLA Section for Library Schools, as it was originally named, took a natural interest in the international manifestations of professional education (Harbo and Bowden, 2004). Activities undertaken by the Section have since become more focused on assisting the development of professional education and developing countries in particular. For more than twenty years, the IFLA Education Section has been overtly committed to promoting the development of library and information science education (IFLA, 1988). More recently, the Section's public statement of purpose confirmed that:

"The state of education and training of librarians in developing countries is a particular concern of the Section." (IFLA, 1992)

A critical evaluation is long overdue to assess the effectiveness of the approaches to international assistance that have been taken by the Section and other organisations to assist the development of Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences (SLIS) (Brewster, 1976). The aim of this paper is not, however, to evaluate the international work that has been done. Rather, it aims to consider factors which may suggest that new approaches could be necessary to strengthen future efforts and ensure their effectiveness.

It is the result of working with and listening to colleagues, particularly in Eastern Europe, the Arab world, and in Latin America, and attempting to respond to their needs in a positive manner. Specifically, it reflects on the outcomes of a recent project, REVISTAS, that was undertaken with support from the European Commission's ALFA programme (*América Latina Formación Académica*) which is sponsored by the European Commission to support collaboration and facilitate the exchange of experience between European and Latin American Universities.¹

REVISTAS - *REd Virtual Sobre Todas las Américas* (which may be translated as "JOURNALS - a virtual network across the Americas") was intended to identify professional journals published in the region with a view to ensuring their wider availability through digitisation and thus contribute to professional education and development. As part of this, the partners in the project also considered the infrastructure of professional education in the region, the availability of learning resources, and the implications for current pedagogy and research. These subjects will be discussed in this paper in the context of the way in which assistance for SLIS in developing countries and countries with economies in transition has been facilitated to date, and the changes that have been or are taking place in both the funding and professional environment that has hitherto supported such activity.

Traditional support for developing SLIS

Almost all the support that was provided for the development of many of those SLIS that were established in developing countries in the last 50 years came through the technical assistance programmes of international and national governmental agencies. Such international assistance programmes have their roots in the cultural diplomacy that was established as a tool of governments in the years immediately preceding and during World War II, when state-funded propaganda began to be used to try to create international political or economic advantage. The British Council was established in 1934, and the provision of books was one of its early tools for cultural diplomacy, aimed at facilitating mutual understanding of political, economic and cultural issues and thus hopefully contributing to global security. Very shortly after its establishment, the British Council began to establish libraries in various countries as part of broader British 'institutes.' During the 1939-1945 war, the British government attached increasing importance to the British Council's work in sustaining good relations with neutral countries in the Middle East (Coombs, 1988), whilst the U.S.

¹ European Commission ALFA programme. [online]:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/alfa/index_en.htm [Accessed 7 August 2004]

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Information Service similarly emphasised activities in central and south America (Brewster, 1976).

Whereas the broader concept of foreign aid, in providing money, commodities or manpower has existed throughout history, technical assistance may be defined as "the supplying of techniques" and is a twentieth century phenomenon (Brewster, 1976). The origins of contemporary approaches to overseas technical assistance lay in the aftermath of World War II, when the victors, led by the U.S.A., attempted to rebuild the shattered economies of the countries that had been occupied. The reconstruction of Germany and Japan also involved the re-orientation of their education systems. These activities thus provided the model for the modernisation of the 'new nations'. The Marshall Plan was launched by the U.S. government in 1947, and generated much confidence in its role as a provider of overseas economic aid, leading to the extension of American assistance beyond those countries that had been damaged in the war.

The victorious allies also sought to establish international institutions capable of restoring order to world politics, through which they also provided technical assistance. Although UNESCO had a pre-war predecessor, the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation, the origins of the present day body and its involvement in the library field lie in the meetings of Allied Ministers of Education that began in 1942 to consider what help would be needed in the occupied countries, and which from 1943 were supported by a Books and Periodicals Commission. Although the task was initially seen as replacing lost and damaged buildings and materials, the member states of the new organisation were quick to point out not only that the shortage of materials was a universal problem, but also that in the underdeveloped countries there were more fundamental problems in library services that required to be addressed. These representations led initially to proposals for a programme to develop public libraries, and eventually to a more broadly based programme intended to assist the development of not only other kinds of libraries but also education for librarianship (Carter, 1964).

Similar considerations have attracted the support of various national agencies. Growing national economies enabled the governments such as France and Germany to offer assistance principally focused on countries with which they had particular historic or linguistic connections, whilst countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden selected beneficiaries largely for humanitarian reasons. Economic considerations have recently led to an increase in Chinese assistance in Africa. Geo-political considerations have influenced Australian and Japanese support towards South-East Asia, while the European Union's EuropeAid programme has provided only short-lived support for higher education in that region, preferring to concentrate resources on its neighbouring states.

Traditional approaches to assisting the development of SLIS

A variety of approaches have been implemented by these national and international organisations to help new countries and new Schools to develop. Through its support for the educational work of the relevant international Non-Governmental Organisations (not only IFLA, but also the International Council on Archives, and the former International Federation for Information and Documentation), UNESCO helped to identify and promote numerous

developments in provision for education in the field. For example, UNESCO was once able to support regular pre-conference seminars organised by IFLA. These brought together a group of about 20 relatively young, leading professionals from different developing countries and different cultures, who seemed likely to continue to make a major contribution to development for a number of years to come, and whose potential influence on government policy might lead to the advancement of librarianship in their countries. Not all these seminars focused on education for librarianship and information work, but they did provide several opportunities for interchange between teachers in the field as a stimulus for curricular development (Johnson, 1989). Other support paid for internationally recognised experts to write guidance reports on national planning for education of information specialists (Neelameghan, 1978; Wilson, 1980), the techniques of conducting manpower studies to underpin developments (Moore, 1986), and curriculum development (Saunders, 1978; Large, 1987). Guidelines were also produced to assist the development of teaching in subjects of emerging importance such as information technology (Cook, 1986) and marketing (e.g. Savard, 1988).

UNESCO's activities even included supporting the establishment of regional Schools of Librarianship during the 1970s, e.g. in the West Indies and the Philippines, and providing regional models for the development of information science programmes during the 1980s in Latin America (Venezuela) and Africa (Nigeria and Ethiopia) (Parker, 1984b). Missions were undertaken by UNESCO staff and other experts to assist the development of these and other Schools. The Schools' staff benefited from the opportunity to develop their expertise and international connections through scholarships to take Masters and Doctoral degrees in the leading SLIS in Europe and North America. UNESCO was at that time also able to offer scholarships for students from the region to attend the newly established programmes, offering the selected students a range and level of courses not available in their own countries.

Despite its reduced circumstances after 1984, UNESCO was occasionally able to continue to support regional meetings of teachers in the field with the aim of identifying their needs for assistance, independently or with co-financing from other agencies and the collaboration of the NGOs. These brought together teachers from SLIS in the Arab World (UNESCO, 1993), in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (UNESCO, 1995a), and in Latin America (Johnson, 1999a). UNESCO's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean has since continued to provide occasional assistance to foster the development of EDIBCIC², which organises a conference every few years to bring together staff from the SLIS in the region.

There have also been numerous examples of bilateral cooperation between Schools of Librarianship and Information Studies, usually supported by one or both of the governments concerned. Examples lasting for many years might

² EDIBCIC - *asociación de Educación e Investigación en Bibliotecología, archivología, y Ciencia de la información y documentación de Iberoamérica y el Caribe* was proposed during the 3rd Conference of teachers and researchers in Librarianship, Archive Studies and Information Science in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Puerto Rico in 1997, and formally established during the 4th Conference held in Maracaibo, Venezuela, 20 to 24 April 1998.

include Kent State University and the University of Warsaw; and between the University of Amsterdam and the National University in Romania. More short term funding has facilitated links between the Robert Gordon University and Univerzita Komenskeho in Bratislava, Slovakia; and the University of Northumbria and the University of Papua New Guinea. Other links have been more generalised. For example, a Dutch government programme to support library development in Pakistan benefited several SLIS there, and involved several in the Netherlands. Several British Schools worked, consecutively, with the Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru in Lima.

The failure of traditional approaches

Paradoxically, these technical assistance programmes have succeeded in exposing their own weakness. The relationship between the curriculum, the changing needs of society, and the job market for information skills began to receive regular attention in the developing nations (Mchombo, 1987; Morales Campos, 1997). For example, as described earlier, the development of SLIS in Latin America and the introduction of new ideas into their curricula have often taken place with foreign assistance (Mueller, 1985; Souza, 1993). However, some imported solutions to the region's information problems have subsequently been recognised as inappropriate because they did not take into account the differing cultural, social, and economic conditions (Goldstein, 1982), and curricular revisions to limit their influence have been necessary (Cesarino and Vianna, 1990).

Perhaps this is one of the reasons that sustainability is widely recognised a challenge for SLIS established with international assistance. As one commentator noted:

“stories abound concerning development projects which commenced with a lot of enthusiasm and much excitement, but whose life span came to a crushing halt once the funding ran out, or the foreign facilitators left... [S]ustainability becomes a cliché rather than a reality.” (Wormell, 2002)

Such critical commentary from a donor is rare, at least in the public domain (Johnson, 2005). Equally rare is criticism from the recipient. However, it is by no means certain that such collaboration has been entirely welcome. Cooperative projects involving institutions from developed and developing countries are also not always seen as a partnership of equals, and sometimes appear to be based solely on paternalistic attitudes (Kigongo-Bukenya, 2004).

Similarly it is rare for institutions in the more developed countries to acknowledge that there are practical tensions in supporting these activities. An individual's ideological commitment to providing assistance to developing countries may conflict with institutional demands, and may not always be recognised as contributing to other aspects of institutional policy for 'internationalisation' (Turner and Robson, 2007). The probable benefits to the more developed partner in terms of staff development (Johnson, 1997b) may often go unrecognised. These tensions have led one activist to comment:

“networking in the academic field is a complex issue: it involves a great potential for inspiration and synergy, but also the need for courage, patience, openness, and respect for the 'different'.” (Wormell, 2002)

Changing patterns of support for development

Moreover, programmes of technical assistance are all subject to the vagaries of political priorities for their support. It is probably no coincidence that the European Commission's programmes of assistance in Latin America were initiated in 1992 during a period when the Spanish government held the Presidency of the European Commission. The European Union's aid programmes for higher education had stemmed initially from the need to assist the central and East European states whose economies have been in transition since the collapse of communism. The TEMPUS programme (*Trans European Mobility Programme for University Studies*)³ was established in 1990, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the aims of improving the capabilities of higher education institutions through development of teaching staff and support for structural improvements. Subsequently TEMPUS was extended to Russia and Central Asia (TEMPUS-TACIS), and later to Europe's other neighbouring countries in North Africa and the Middle East (TEMPUS-MEDA), and the Western Balkans (TEMPUS-CARDS).

However, the application of political priorities to budget allocations are just as likely to lead to reductions or shifts in allocations for technical assistance, and projects initiated with this kind of support can thus suffer from a lack of continuity.

"Development projects are subject to the mercurial politics which initiate and support them, particularly so if the sponsoring agency is a governmental one but also sometimes in the case of private philanthropies ..." (Brewster, 1976).

The withdrawal of American and British financial support in 1984 resulted in a significant reduction in UNESCO's budget. Shifts in UNESCO's priorities - driven to some extent by the expressed views of the representatives of member states, and to a lesser extent by internal politics and personality clashes within the responsible UNESCO Division - have reduced the allocation of funds for activities related to developing professional education in the information field.

TEMPUS was refocused when the borders of the European Union moved east, and the new member states became potential partners in delivering assistance rather than recipients. More recently TEMPUS suffered a temporary hiatus following the failure of the Heads of State to agree a new budget for the European Commission. An announcement due later in 2007 is expected to confirm that higher education remains a priority for co-operation activities with the countries surrounding the European Union, and that the TEMPUS programme of university co-operation will be continued over the period 2007 to 2013. However, a note on the programme's web homepage indicates that the "*content and modalities... are... being developed.*" In other words, some changes can be expected - in funding levels, priorities and procedures.

National agency priorities and programmes are also liable to change. The British Council, whilst remaining active in Europe and in the countries of the British

³ TEMPUS homepage: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/tempus/index_en.html [Accessed 14 May 2007]

Commonwealth, has noticeably shifted the emphasis in its declining allocation of resources from region to region over the last 50 years in support of prevailing government diplomatic efforts (Coombs, 1988). Its presence in Latin America was reinforced after the Falklands war, but then scaled back when the Soviet empire collapsed and funds needed to be redirected East. The range of activities that it is willing and able to support has also been influenced by reductions in funding resulting from changes in government priorities, not least a recent commitment to the United Nations' Millennium Goals and a 'pro-poor' agenda seemingly more attractive to the electorate, albeit arguably less attuned to the national economic and diplomatic interests. The geographic focus and underlying aims of American assistance have also shifted for geo-political reasons (Brewster, 1976). The re-unification of Germany and the consequent fiscal pressures on the Federal budget led to a reduction in support for international development in the library field. A recent change of government in Denmark resulted in a reduced budget and new priorities for its international aid agency DANIDA, leading to a reduction in support for nationals of developing countries to participate in the annual IFLA World Library and Information Conference.

Despite the known importance of effective communication of ideas and information in the development process (Rogers, 1995), the role of libraries in that process and the consequent need to support education for librarianship are not necessarily perceived by governmental agencies as a natural focus for their activities in economic, social and educational development. For example, only 8 library education programmes in 6 countries in Asia and Latin America were assisted by the U.S. government during the 1960s. This typical low level of involvement at a time when library development was relatively generously supported emphasises the challenge that is now faced in a period of increasing scarcity of funds from traditional sources. The existing, implicit competition in attracting support for library development projects of all kinds is made more explicit by the increasing tendency of the national and international agencies to establish bidding processes for those funds that are available. Experience to date is not encouraging. In the 10 years from 1994 to 2004, the ALFA programme accepted 380 proposals. Whilst some support for libraries may have been implicit in some of these, only 3 of them were projects that specifically supported the development of librarianship and information work. Only one other, unsuccessful proposal is known to the author, and the evidence from this and other European aid programmes suggests that librarians and SLIS may not be particularly active and certainly are not particularly successful in bidding for funds for international development projects.

Even if they were active and successful in bidding for the available funds, more certain is the fact that most such technical assistance support is short-term, and there is therefore no certainty that these projects would create the necessary expertise or will to sustain continuing development. American assistance for the development of library education, with a few notable exceptions, has tended to take the form of a single, isolated intervention, mainly funded by *ad hoc* State Department grants or the Fulbright program, with little continuity or integration between successive projects (Brewster, 1976). Efforts by the British Council to help initiate a new School in Merida in Mexico came to nothing (Evans, Arellano, and Kennedy, 1985). UNESCO's attempt to mobilise an educational response to changes in the professional environment in Latin America during the 1980s, could also – by one measure – be deemed to have failed. The programme in

Simon Bolivar University in Venezuela, established as a regional model for the development of information science programmes (Paez Urdaneta, 1991), has been closed since the withdrawal of UNESCO scholarship support.

Growth in the number of SLIS

Whilst these shifts in support for LIS education have been taking place, little note has been taken of the substantial growth in the number of SLIS worldwide. The last 50 years has seen a dramatic growth in the number of SLIS globally, encouraged by the expansion of education and research and the emergence of a society whose continued development depends increasingly on access to information.

In 1972, UNESCO published the first international directory of SLIS, listing some 304 in 60 countries (UNESCO, 1972). The acknowledged shortcomings of that list led to the compilation of a new guide, supported by a UNESCO contracts awarded to IFLA and carried out on its behalf by active members of the Section on Education and Training (Fang and Nauta, 1985). That guide listed 529 SLIS in 100 countries. Ten years later, after the fragmentation of the former Soviet Union, a second edition was supported by UNESCO, and reported 443 SLIS in 113 countries (Fang and others, 1995). Even allowing for SLIS that were known to have closed during the intervening years, those figures probably under-recorded the total in existence because of varying levels of response. The directory records 72 countries as having provided no evidence of the existence of SLIS, including several countries from which institutions had responded to the 1985 survey and where it is known that those SLIS continue to operate to this day.

Latin America reveals similar patterns of growth – and of non-response to questionnaires. The principal users of the journals identified by the REVISTAS project were expected to be the Schools and Departments teaching and undertaking research in the discipline, and the compilation of a list of SLIS was undertaken so that the information about available journals could be distributed to them. Previously published directories of SLIS in Latin America have been both inconsistent and incomplete in their coverage. The first UNESCO directory, published in 1972, identified only 34 Schools in 11 of the 20 Spanish and Portuguese speaking states in the region, although many of these were no more than training centres established by major libraries. The 1985 directory recorded 71 Schools in 17 countries, while the editors of the 1995 directory secured reports from only 47 Schools, although, again, only 3 countries were not represented.

Further investigations of web-based directories revealed that, since c.1970, at least 127 institutions had offered courses in librarianship and Information Sciences in the Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in Latin America, although it was not possible to find evidence to confirm that 26 of these institutions are currently offering courses (Johnson, 2006).

Nonetheless, it appears that during the last 35 years, the number of SLIS in Latin America has tripled, and a similar pattern of growth has probably occurred elsewhere in the world. Indeed, the forthcoming edition of the world guide will

list over 1,000 SLIS (Schniederjürgen, 2007). Whilst some of the total may be accounted for by past under-recording, it is clear that many new SLIS have been established in response to locally perceived needs and expectations in their countries. This has occurred at a time when existing SLIS were required to make continual efforts to revise and extend curricula to respond to developments in the theoretical and technological bases of the profession, and to changes in professional best practice. As has been noted, during the latter half of the Twentieth Century, the international development agencies frequently supported relationships between a new SLIS in a developing country and an established School in a more advanced nation to try to facilitate these changes. Clearly, the scale of growth that we now recognise in the number of SLIS represents a challenge to such traditional approaches to providing technical assistance, both in terms of funding links and in terms of finding willing and active partners.

Another failed solution?

Technical assistance programmes have usually focused on planning and developing modern curricula, and in introducing new teaching methods. In addition, UNESCO and other agencies have long since recognized the need to support the development of learning resources collections in emerging SLIS (Parker, 1984a; White, 1982), and the development of re-usable teaching materials (e.g. Simmons, 1986; Harris, 1987).

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This approach first came to prominence in the 1960s. One of the purposes of the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse for Information and Technology (ERIC), established in 1966/67 (with its subsidiary Clearing House for Library and Information Science at Syracuse University) was to collect teaching materials and make them more widely available in the U.S.A. In time this became known as an international resource centre, but it too has suffered problems in sustaining support. Material from the Clearing House for Library and Information Science had to be relocated to Simmons College following a shift in priorities at Syracuse, and in the early 21st Century ERIC had to be totally re-oriented following cuts imposed by the U.S. government.

Deleted: Whether this would have succeeded in Latin America is debatable. Prior to the widespread availability of automated systems linked to the Internet, the locations of significant collections within the region were not well known, and: ¶
"The main challenge was to find a research library whose active periodical subscriptions represented their particular region as opposed to imprints limited to the national level... [but] Collection identification is often possible when a library has an online catalogue that permits searching..." (Williams, 2003: 53) ¶
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However, the evidence from searching the online catalogues that are now available confirms that many libraries have only incomplete runs of journals. ¶
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Some 10 years after the creation of ERIC, a similar idea was proposed as a means of strengthening professional education in developing countries when advances in technology and telecommunications seemed to be beginning to make it a realisable possibility (Reid Smith, 1977). Cooperation such as this requires a catalyst to draw together, aid, and stimulate the efforts of different agencies. It was not until the mid-1990s, when the Internet began to connect the developing countries, that attempts to introduce a global pilot scheme to link SLIS and encourage the sharing of teaching ideas and material were finally made by UNESCO. Although UNESCO's funding had been curtailed, the Organisation continued to try to support collaboration between SLIS, and in 1995 launched a new initiative SLISNET, an experimental international network of Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences. This was founded at a meeting held in Pittsburgh in December 1995 attended by 16 Schools that had been associated with previous UNESCO activities (UNESCO, 1995b). The intention of SLISNET was that the exchange of advice and information between Schools was expected to be facilitated by communication through the Internet. It was, however,

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discontinued as a result of a shift in the priorities for UNESCO's limited budget
(Johnson, 1997).

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Nonetheless, the concept lingered. UNESCO funded two surveys in Latin America in 1997/98 to investigate the problems of human resources development for LIS in the region (Johnson, 1999b; Johnson, Fuertes Medina, and Herrera, 2001), followed by an international workshop in Valparaiso in 1998 to discuss the outcomes. Participants in that workshop also suggested sharing teaching materials to support independent curricular development (Johnson, 1998). By then the idea may have begun to lose credibility.

An alternative solution?

However, the participants in the workshop in Valparaiso also pointed to the problems arising from limited access to professional publications and learning materials, particularly those in indigenous languages.

Their perception that access to contemporary information about developments is a significant problem hindering LIS development in Latin America echoes opinions stretching over the last 30 years. An Argentine librarian was the first to associate the problems of the profession in the region to the lack of journals and other research-orientated publications (Sabor, 1977). In the early 1990s, she again bemoaned the situation, but by then her perception of the cause focused on the lack of indigenous journals (Sabor, 1992).

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Participants in a conference of SLIS representatives from Latin America that was held in Puerto Rico in 1992, in outlining the specific problems of developing LIS programmes in their countries, also pointed *inter alia* to the problems of access to professional literature, and resolved to take advantage of the opportunities presented by new technologies (Mauro Sardo and Williams, 1993).

In 1997/8, a series of visits had also been made by the author as part of a small research project (RELACION - **Red Europea y Latinoamericana en Ciencias de la informaciÓN**) supported by the ALFA programme to interview LIS teachers and practitioners in Latin America. These identified a number of common themes stemming from their continual efforts to develop their curricula and research base. Staff development was a critical issue. Opportunities for sharing experiences with professional colleagues were constrained by geographic isolation and variable library resources. Access to journals presented problems not only of affordability but also of literacy. Although many teaching staff could read English, the ability of students to speak or read English varied.

American librarians working for universities offering site based and online programmes in Latin America have also noted that:

"collections ... have not been sufficient to support doctoral research."
(Ramirez and Tunon, 2003)

Improvements in access to the region's journals began to seem a potential way forward. However, for the less wealthy, developing countries, producing printed journals has long been a problem (Wise, 1994), hampering efforts to stimulate indigenous research and enhance teaching. A lack of resources or organisational

capacity in Latin America has prevented or seriously delayed the publication and dissemination of the region's professional journals (Johnson, 1976; Babini and Smart, 2006). The consequences have been that most journals have been published irregularly or had a short life before closing down, and the vast majority of the LIS journals known to have been published in the region have, until now, often been difficult to access because of their limited circulation outside national boundaries.

Electronic journals were beginning to play an increasingly significant role in widening access to the information resources of the developing countries. The range of journals produced in developing countries that are available online has subsequently increased, principally as a result of a variety of initiatives by not-for-profit agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations. These have not only enabled economically disadvantaged countries to overcome the underlying problems in the production, marketing and distribution of professional journals, but also enhanced international access to their research. They can also change pedagogical approaches, which at present necessarily give little emphasis to independent study and the development of critical thinking, and thus create a virtuous circle which encourages a research culture in the SLIS and an evidence-based approach to professional practice and a greater published output.

Three years ago, it was noted that about 20 of the existing print-based journals in the field of LIS appeared to have been already made available electronically in full text (Urbizagástegui Alvarado, 2004), and a smaller number of solely electronic journals had been initiated. REVISTAS (**REd VIrtual Sobre Todas las AméRicaS**), undertaken between 2004 and 2007, was a study of the feasibility of digitising the journals in the LIS field in Spanish and Portuguese, particularly those published in Latin America. In some respects the project was overtaken by the rapid changes taking place in electronic publishing.

Beginning with a list of serial titles indexed in the region's principal, open access index to LIS journals, INFOBILA⁴, a search was made in the major listing of Latin American journals, Latindex⁵, as well as several library catalogues. A final web search was carried out in early March 2007 using the metasearch engine 'Dogpile' to check for online versions of the list of titles that had been gathered to date.⁶

It must be acknowledged that more titles probably remain to be discovered by individuals more familiar with LIS publishing in their own countries. Nonetheless, these investigations revealed that at least 299 serial titles in LIS had been or were currently being published in Spanish or Portuguese, of which 90 are available online in full text versions. 48 of these originated within the region. However, no more than 29 of the 90 could be located through the largest aggregator of online journals in the region, and few appear in any indexing service. Indeed only 2 are currently indexed in INFOBILA, which is itself apparently not well known. While the major problem of access to the region's

⁴ INFOBILA [online]: <http://cuib.laborales.unam.mx> [Accessed 7 August, 2004]

⁵ Latindex - Sistema Regional de Información en Línea para Revistas Científicas de América Latina, el Caribe, España y Portugal. [online]: <http://www.latindex.unam.mx> [Accessed 17 October 2004]

⁶ 'Dogpile' [online]: <http://www.dogpile.com/> [Accessed 1 March 2007]

literature is on the way to being resolved, provided that more effort is devoted to raising awareness of what is now available, other problems inherent in the previous print-based system of professional journal publishing clearly remain, including quality control and regularity of publication (Johnson and Cano, 2007).

Future Development

Because of their isolated professional context, many SLIS have found themselves unable to respond to the social and economic needs of their countries in an informed way and as effectively as they might wish.

SLIS wishing to participate in international collaborative activities are now more likely to have to initiate a request for funding themselves, and to have to submit a proposal in competition with other disciplines and institutions. So we need to ask what we can be done to develop a greater awareness of the funds that might be available to assist development, a greater willingness to bid for available funds, and greater expertise in preparing bids that are more likely to be successful?

However, it will remain the case that the funds available will remain relatively limited in terms of the potential number of beneficiary institutions that now exist. And most technical assistance programmes will continue to be funded only in the short-term. So what can be done to promote more widespread and more sustainable forms of development?

Ways and means of underpinning local initiatives in curricular development are essential. Teachers' knowledge, skills, and abilities need to be continually reinforced and updated in the developing countries as much as anywhere, and it is clear that they want to develop curricula that are relevant in their own societies – and they are perfectly capable of doing that if they are given the tools they need. So what could be done to help the developing world's Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences to develop their own curricula and teaching materials? Making relevant journals more readily available could clearly make a significant contribution to this. The major commercial publishers have made gestures of support to the LIS profession, who act as intermediaries for their major customers. EBSCO has made its indexing service, LISTA, freely available.⁷ Elsevier has made its full-text LIS journals freely available through HINARI. These are clearly welcome, although their benefits are limited in the former case to identifying material that may not be accessible and in the latter case to a limited user group. And both are largely dealing with the literature produced in the more developed countries, which may not immediately be relevant in the developing world.

The experience of Latin America is not unique. African librarianship has not benefited from stability in the range of publications that have appeared. It is clear that quality has not been a first priority of the region's authors (Sturges and Neill, 2004). The only significant bibliography on the subject is now itself out of date, but records a string of short-lived titles and incomplete collections

⁷ LISTA [online]: <http://www.epnet.com/thisTopic.php?topicID=205&marketID=20> [Accessed 12 May 2007]

(Prichard, 1987). The number of African LIS titles available through electronic publishers appears small.⁸

So what we could be done to help colleagues in the developing world's SLIS to improve the quality, and the availability, of the professional literature published in the developing regions? How could they be helped to improve the quality, the regularity of publication, and the online availability of the professional literature that they have produced and are producing?

There is one further issue. My observation of the institutions that I have worked in or with, suggests that a major contributor to the development of SLIS is the energy, political acumen, and leadership skills of the Head of School. So, what could be done to help our colleagues in the developing world's Schools to develop those skills?

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⁸ See AJOL – African Journals Online: <http://www.ajol.info/> [Accessed 14 May 2007]

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