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## **Supporting research in area studies: a guide for academic libraries**

*Lesley Pitman*

*Librarian and Director of Information Services, UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library, London, UK*

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## Introduction

In this book I aim to set out the ways in which academic libraries can best support a diverse and challenging community of academic researchers; those working in area studies. In drawing on the latest thinking on research support as part of academic librarianship, I have attempted to show how the distinctive nature of area studies research and area studies librarianship might provide useful examples of good practice when considering how best to support our increasingly international universities. The book is aimed at students studying for a professional qualification, library staff charged with supporting an area studies centre or department, and senior library management considering the implications of supporting research that transcends boundaries between individual countries, disciplines and languages. Although it does not address directly the current debate around the role of subject support in an academic library, it does aim to keep the practical needs and experiences of researchers in the foreground at all times, while bearing in mind the rapidly changing environment for academic publishing and scholarly communication.

I hope I can also show that in addition to meeting the needs of a particular user community, there are other advantages to be gained from a better understanding of how international research more broadly defined can be supported. Developments in collaborative collection management over the last few years have started to grapple with the problem of ensuring that the UK has a coherent national research collection of material from overseas, properly managed and maintained, although there is not as yet agreement on how that might be achieved. As universities across the UK and US develop strategies for internationalising their research and teaching, the methods used to support area studies research can help academic libraries meet the wider needs of a more global user community working in all disciplines. At a recent conference in the United States on the future of area studies one academic puts it thus: "Area, international, and foreign language studies will become a central component of the internationalized university of the future. But to get there, they have to survive the present." (Merkx, 2012)

There is much debate about the definition of the term "area studies" and some of this debate is described in the relevant chapter. For the purposes of this book I have assumed an entirely pragmatic definition. If a department, centre or individual defines themselves as working within area studies or (more likely) one of its subdivisions, for example Slavonic (or Slavic in the US), European, Asian, African, or Latin American studies, then they come within the scope of this book. Their research might be in any of the humanities or social sciences, or even cross at times into the sciences or medicine. It might be individual or collaborative, and if the latter, then the collaboration is very likely to be inter-disciplinary. It will certainly require detailed knowledge of one or more country or region outside their home country, and is very likely to require knowledge of languages other than English and access to materials in those languages. Often it will be seen as rather obscure and of minority interest, and the field nationally and internationally will be small, although there is some overlap with the fields of global and international studies. Beyond that it is the very difficulty of defining it further that creates one of the many challenges for libraries, but also makes it a useful precursor of the more recent movement towards inter-, cross- and trans-disciplinary research in universities.

Because of its particular history area studies tends to be found in what we used to think of as the "West". The UK, USA and Europe have developed strengths in area studies over the last hundred years as they have tried to gain a better understanding of the rest of the world. For practical reasons I have limited my focus on the whole to the UK and the USA, with occasional examples from elsewhere. My particular experience lies in supporting Slavonic studies in the UK so many of my examples come from that environment, but I have set out to capture the features that characterise area studies as a whole, rather than focus too much on any one area.

The first chapter, on “the academic landscape” looks more closely at the debates around the definition of area studies, describes trends in area studies research and considers how it organises itself institutionally and nationally. Chapter 2, on area studies librarianship, is considered as a separate strand of librarianship, with features that make it distinct from subject librarianship.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover different aspects of collection management. Chapter 3 concentrates on what has traditionally been the primary focus of area studies librarianship, the selection and acquisition of publications, particularly but not only from abroad. It considers practical problems in procurement and budgeting, barriers to acquisition, successive national initiatives aimed at addressing gaps in the national collection, and ethical issues around acquiring publications and other resources from other countries. Chapter 4 covers other aspects of collection management, including collection assessment, the role of national libraries, and developments in national collaborative collection management as they affect the national research collection of foreign publications.

While previous chapters consider electronic publications alongside print publications and material in other formats, chapter 5 focuses on the opportunities created by the digital revolution, and highlights the role that area studies librarians can play in helping both to curate and to create new types of international research resources.

The remaining two chapters identify the demands that area studies scholars are likely to make on the generic functions of the library. How well do the various resource discovery tools, from the classification scheme to the Library catalogue, cope with area studies collections, especially that part of the collection that is not in English? How can we ensure that we are not inadvertently hiding relevant material from researchers because we haven’t sufficiently addressed the different standards used at different times or in different databases? How can a researcher get reliable advice on copyright issues relating to material produced abroad? What sort of skills training will a group of research students in an area studies department need? What priority is given to dealing with what can be seen as minority interests, and how can the solutions benefit the institution as a whole?

Finally I have provided a brief list of useful professional organisations as a guide for readers wanting access to the expert networks that are so vital to area studies librarianship.

Inevitably I can only touch on each question, but I hope that the references will allow anyone interested in a particular question to research it in greater depth, and perhaps go on to add to the rather too limited body of work on area studies librarianship. Although there is a substantial body of work on international librarianship its focus tends to be on libraries in other countries, rather than on making our own libraries more international in their focus. As the sources I have used are mainly Anglo-American almost all the references I have cited are available electronically. Where there has been a choice I have cited the electronic version as that reflects the way in which I have accessed them and hope will make it easier for anyone else who would like to do the same. The process of tracking down sources and doing the research necessary for this book has been invaluable in reminding me of the challenges experienced by researchers every day in navigating through such an incredibly complex information landscape.

I would like to thank Chandos for commissioning me to write this book, and giving me the opportunity to explore the experiences of colleagues working in other parts of area studies librarianship. It has been a privilege to learn from those colleagues and fellow librarians who have taken the trouble to document their work in the professional literature. I have also learnt an enormous amount from many colleagues over the years, first in Chatham House Library, and then for the last 25 years in the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library. The Slavonic library community in the United Kingdom has always been a friendly and supportive community, generous in sharing its expertise through the work of the Council

of Slavonic and East European Library and Information Services (COSEELIS), an organisation I was lucky enough to chair for nine years. The US mailing list Slavlibs has kept me in touch with the work of my colleagues in the United States. My partner David Grinyer has put up nobly with the disruption to our daily life, and has also commented astutely on the text. All errors remain my own.

## 1. Area studies: the academic landscape

### **Abstract:**

This chapter looks first at official and academic definitions of area studies, and the scope and variety of the field, which is likely to be different in each university. Although largely considered to date from the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the US, its roots go back further. Controversies from the past have largely been resolved. Area studies today is a varied and dynamic field, with researchers skilled in their discipline, knowledge of a country or region, and dependent on material in a range of languages. This creates a challenge for academic libraries.

**Keywords:** area studies, definition of area studies, controversies around area studies, strategic importance of area studies, library support for area studies.

### **Definitions and Controversies**

The first difficulty in deciding how best to support research in area studies is to decide what the term means. There is no single, widely understood definition, and the nature of area studies is in itself the subject of considerable academic discussion and some controversy. There have been long-running and sometimes heated disagreements in the academic community about how it should be defined, and even about the value of area studies as a distinct field of academic endeavour. As an umbrella term it can cover such a broad range of activity that a single definition can be misleading and unhelpful. This section will attempt to summarise some of the questions around area studies and identify current trends in a very diverse landscape. It will also look at the different types of research that are carried out under the broad heading of area studies, and try to identify those common elements that cause particular challenges for academic libraries. These will then be dealt with in more detail in subsequent chapters.

An attempt to find an official definition of area studies in the UK leads us to the formal process for assessing the quality of research carried out in UK universities, and an explicit recognition of the difficulty. Every few years the UK government carries out a review process most recently entitled the Research Excellence Framework, or REF. The guidelines for submission to the Area Studies sub-panel for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework define area studies as “the study of all regions of the world and the communities which are associated with or which inhabit them.” (REF 2014, 2012). Alongside this rather vague statement they provide a useful list of the sub-divisions of area studies most likely to be studied in the UK at the present time:

The sub-panel takes an inclusive view of Area Studies, which we recognise to be a dynamic field, and the following list should be considered as indicative rather than exhaustive: African studies; American and Anglophone studies, including Canada and the United States, taken to include colonial North America; Asian studies, including Central Asian, North East Asian (including China), South Asian and South East Asian studies; Latin American and Caribbean studies; Australian, New Zealand and Pacific studies; European studies, including European Union studies and Russian and East European studies (including post-Soviet studies); Middle Eastern studies including Israel studies and Islamic world studies; and the interactions of these regions and peoples with the wider world, including African, Asian, Jewish, Muslim and other diasporas.” (REF 2014, 2012))

The list of disciplines from which they are prepared to receive submissions gives an indication of the range of research currently taking place and captures both traditional and newer approaches:

all aspects of the history, languages, cultures, literatures, religions, media, society, economics, human geography, politics and international relations of the above areas, as well as inter-regional and globalisation studies. (REF 2014, 2012)

Taken together this list of regions and disciplines potentially covers the humanities and social sciences of most of the world, excluding only the country where the research is carried out – in this case the United Kingdom. The divisions are partly geopolitical, partly cultural and partly religious, and in the final phrase all such divisions are abandoned, allowing for global studies and comparative studies to be included as well. There is almost no limit on the disciplines included, apart from pure and applied science, and even they could be included in their historical and cultural aspects. The changing nature of area studies is recognised in the use of the word “dynamic”, as is the potentially all-encompassing nature of it. There is probably no university in the UK or even the world that could claim to carry out research on the whole of area studies as defined above. Instead most will specialise in particular regions or countries, applying to them the techniques and theories of a more limited range of disciplines. The scope of area studies research will thus be different in each university where it is carried out.

Academics engaged in area studies from various perspectives have attempted more precise and concise definitions, aiming to capture the purpose of area studies research rather than simply describing it. In a piece on Japanese studies in the US Alan Tansman provides the following succinct definition: “an enterprise seeking to know, analyze, and interpret foreign cultures through a multi-disciplinary lens”

In the same volume David Szanton produces a useful and widely accepted definition which goes further in summarising the features that differentiate area studies research from other fields:

"Area Studies" is best understood as a cover term for a family of academic fields and activities joined by a common commitment to: (1) intensive language study; (2) in-depth field research in the local language(s); (3) close attention to local histories, viewpoints, materials, and interpretations; (4) testing, elaborating, critiquing, or developing grounded theory against detailed observation; and (5) multi-disciplinary conversations often crossing the boundaries of the social sciences and humanities.(Szanton, 2004)

In Oxford in 2005, shortly after Szanton wrote his definition, a workshop funded by the ESRC and the AHRC for UK area studies scholars was also grappling with the question of what area studies should be. The three definitions the participants came up with were as follows: “area-led area studies (eg the study of Japan per se); globalisation-led area studies (eg multidisciplinary and comparative research within regions); issue-led area studies (eg. terrorism, democracy, etc.)”. The workshop agreed that “high quality area studies needs to be involved in all three of these areas and certainly not restrict itself to just the first” (Goodman, 2007).

The literature shows that successive attempts to define area studies and prescribe its direction have been intended to answer some long standing criticisms, usually applied by those working in the more traditional single disciplines with a longer history in the academy. The first and the one that has caused most controversy in the past is that area studies research is lacking in intellectual rigour, and is not soundly based on theory. It is true that there is no theory of area studies as it is not a separate discipline in itself, but the criticism has been that scholars working in area studies have not in the past recognised developments in theory, particularly in the social sciences. Instead their work has been accused of being purely descriptive. In the 1990s this debate played out within the American Political Science Association in a series of articles that looked at the relationship between

area studies and political science, published in response to a provocative "Letter from the President" by Robert H. Bates, then President of the Comparative Politics Section of the Association, who described area studies scholars as both hostile to and "lagging behind" in their grasp of theory. To bridge the gap that he perceived, he advocated a future where area studies scholars would apply themselves to gathering the empirical data that the social scientists would then analyse, using the techniques of game theory and rational choice theory. (Bates, 1996) In the ensuing debate between the advocates of area studies and those of theory, strong opinions were expressed on both sides and the divisions seemed deep, but over the intervening years the two sets of skills have come much closer together. Although it is still the case that area studies research is likely to have a strong empirical element the tools of academic theory are now an intrinsic part of the training of an area studies researcher as they are in any other field. One American expert on Japan sees the tensions between theory and empirical research in area studies as "the greatest source of its vitality and potential" (Tansman, 2004). At a 2012 conference on area studies at Duke University the Director of International and Area Studies at that university captured the way that the approach to theory had changed:

Forty years ago the study of comparative politics consisted largely of case studies of individual countries, whereas today the dominant modalities are cross-national studies of the interactions among specific variables, using as units not just whole polities but often sub-national units like states or provinces, as well as game-theoretic analysis of policy choice and voting behavior." (Merkx, 2012)

A related criticism is one that the study of a single country or region is unnecessary in an age of globalization. All issues of strategic importance nowadays are global, whether we are talking about the rise of global business, global warming, feminism, terrorism or the Occupy movement. As these issues transcend national boundaries there is nothing to be gained from a detailed study of a single country or region, and new problems can only be resolved by bringing together a wide range of disciplinary expertise to generate innovative approaches that apply worldwide. It is interesting to note, however, that it is in area studies centres over the last 100 years that academics working in a range of disciplines are most likely to come together, outside the rather rigid disciplinary boundaries of the traditional university department. In many ways there is a greater tradition of working across disciplines in area studies than in other academic areas, and the term "interdisciplinary" has developed since the 1940s along the same trajectory as area studies. Scholars have also resisted the idea that local or regional knowledge has nothing to add, and underlying some of these arguments is a refusal to accept that Western theory developed in western universities can simply be applied across the world. Szanton sees an important role for area studies in redressing the balance by bringing in other viewpoints. He says

the fundamental role of Area Studies in the United States has been - and continues to be - to deparochialize US- and Euro-centric visions of the world in the core social science and humanities disciplines, among policy makers, and in the public at large. (Szanton, 2004)

The Oxford workshop makes a slightly different point: "in fact the most important element of area studies knowledge is often the integrated historico-sociological understanding of large and complex societies." (Goodman, 2007)

By making such claims for itself area studies lays itself open to accusations of failure. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism were not widely predicted by scholars working in Soviet Studies, although there were minority voices. The same was true 20 years later of the Arab Spring. On the other hand, a failure to predict the future is not limited to area studies. The collapse of the financial system in 2007 to 2008 was not foreseen by most economists, although again there were a few warning voices.

Area studies has also from time to time been criticised for being rather a patronising activity. Is it really necessary for scholars in western universities to explain other societies when the people there are quite capable of speaking for themselves? It has traditionally been the role of anthropology to study and interpret societies that are not in a position to be easily understood. One answer to this has been simple and effective. Most area studies departments have for many years actively recruited experts from the area in question and they add their disciplinary skills and local perspective to the mix. As two US specialists on Latin America have said: "Latin American studies is something that North Americans do with Latin Americans, not to Latin Americans." (Drake & Hilbink, 2004).

There can be presentational issues with the language of area studies as well. Some of the terminology can be deeply problematic in the modern world, partly because its meaning is not clear, but more importantly because it can reinforce an outdated view of the world. Where is Eastern Europe? It used to include the whole of Europe east of the Berlin Wall, but a glance at a map of Europe shows that countries such as the Czech Republic or Slovenia are in no sense to the east of many countries traditionally considered part of Western Europe. Instead as modern nation states and full members of the European Union they have much in common with France or Spain, or the UK. Is Russia part of Europe, or is it part of the rather mystifying Eurasia, a term that has never become part of common parlance? The word "Oriental" lingers in the name of some academic units, but is hardly ever used nowadays in other contexts and has been thoroughly debunked with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. What is included in Asian or African studies and why? Is North Africa studied with the Middle East, or with Africa South of the Sahara? How does Israel fit into Middle East and Islamic Studies? In many cases the terminology used is historic and rooted in events taking place at the time a particular institution or centre was established. Over time that grouping then takes on its own life and becomes largely accepted, especially when set against the costs and administrative difficulties of changing institutional names and structures. One practical answer to why certain countries are studied together will strike a chord with librarians expected to be able to work across multiple unrelated languages. It is given by Stephen E. Hanson in a piece responding to the debate begun by Bates on the role of area studies in political science:

Language groupings alone thus provide one clear rationale for traditional area studies programs, since notwithstanding the enormous linguistic diversity of all world regions, there are still major languages in each region that are widely shared among elites—and new political ideas formulated in these languages therefore tend to diffuse quickly along the lines of dominant linguistic communities (Hanson, 2008)

Why do we study some countries and not others? In most UK universities French and German departments, with their programmes in language, literature and history, are not considered part of area studies, and will only be subsumed within "European Studies" when the research interests move into the social sciences and become transnational. It is important, also, not to forget the role of scholars working in the humanities within area studies departments and centres, who often find their research in literature, culture and the arts squeezed for resources as it seen as less relevant to the national need. Of course to some extent the definition of area studies depends on where you are, and from the perspective of the UK it is enlightening to realise that there is academic work going on across the world in British studies. In the UK a great deal of research across the humanities and social sciences could be defined as British studies but in practice that focus is implicit and assumed. Overseas that is not the case and the multiple functions of area studies become clear. The Centre for British Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin was founded in 1995 with several tasks:

to promote, through interdisciplinary teaching and research, the ideal of cross-cultural understanding. At the same time the Centre is not only a reminder of Britain's past



role as one of the Allied powers in Berlin, but also a symbol of the continuing close ties between Germany and Britain. ("Centre for British Studies," 2014.)

Students at the Centre study British history, culture, literature, law, politics, business and economics. British scholars speak at their conferences and the Centre has had joint research projects with Kings College London on the theme of "connectivity" and with the University of Oxford on law. Academics from the centre appear on German media to explain developments in the UK such as the creation of a coalition government as a result of the 2011 election. Further afield, the Society of British Studies of the Chinese Association of European Studies held its seventh annual conference in 2012 on "Britain's Evolving Role in the World - Change and Continuity". It was attended by British diplomats and a small number of British academics, alongside the Chinese scholars. In the US there is a large community of scholars working in British studies, although the major field of interest is history, and the North American conference on British Studies takes place each year.

Over the last two decades it has become much more the case that scholars are bringing to their research a sound theoretical grounding in a traditional discipline, and equally are contributing to that discipline evidence from detailed knowledge of a particular part of the world. In many cases that local knowledge comes from an individual's personal background. A Japanese economist working on the economy of Japan is simply an economist while in Japan, but is as likely to be based in an area studies centre outside Japan as in an economics department. In fact any overview of academic profiles on institutional websites now shows that most area studies scholars describe themselves first by their discipline, particularly if that discipline falls within the social sciences. So they are historians, economists, political scientists or sociologists first, and apply their expertise to the study of a particular region or country. This drive has been strongest in the social sciences and it is not so true within the more traditional humanities fields such as literature, where there is a stronger tradition within the discipline of specialisation in the literature of a particular country or region, but even in those areas the nature of research has moved from the descriptive and historical to encompass the theoretical as well. From his background in the humanities side of Japanese studies, Tansman proposes a rather daunting ideal vision of text-based area studies scholarship as it should be:

In an atmosphere of intellectual honesty, all Area Studies work would be conceived as acts of translation, in which scholars would grapple with foreign materials in their own terms and strive to render clearer what seemed opaque. They would link their analyses to larger intellectual problems through a language of theory that did not swallow up the original object. They might even arrive at original theoretical insights. Their "grappling" with foreign textual and lived experience would be accomplished through the same tools used in the work of translation: the deep and wide, but careful and close reading of the archive. These translators' sensibilities and analytical skills would be honed by expansive reading across disciplines and in a range of theory, and guided by rigorous disciplinary training in the tools of interpretation. They would possess the flexibility to recognize the value of humility before an awesome undertaking, and the place in their work of other intangibles like intuition and talent." (Tansman, 2004)

Bringing together all the different elements that comprise area studies does seem like an awesome undertaking, both for researchers and for librarians supporting their work, but the wider benefits in gaining a better understanding of the world outside our immediate surroundings should be clear. To give just one example: in April 2013 in the United States two young men brought up in America but born in Chechnya bombed the Boston marathon, killing three people, injuring many others, and causing an American city to be brought to a standstill for several days. The level of public understanding was so low that it became necessary for the Ambassador of the Czech Embassy to the United States to issue a

statement to correct misinformation being disseminated across social media, and to explain that "The Czech Republic and Chechnya are two very different entities - the Czech Republic is a Central European country; Chechnya is a part of the Russian Federation"(Gandalovič, 2013). Journalists were despatched to the Caucasus to explain to the public the nature of this distant and historically troubled region. As Islamist fundamentalists wage war at home and threaten western countries the need for specialists on the Arab world has been obvious for some time, but expertise in Ukrainian history, culture and politics was seen as a very niche specialism until Russia exerted its claim to Ukrainian territory, and a Malaysian aircraft was shot down with massive international loss of life. As we become more globalised and international problems become more acute the need for high quality area studies research in our universities seems stronger than ever. The American political scientist Gabriel Almond made the case in a 2002 collection of writings looking back over a career that spanned the twentieth century:

"The depth and distribution of detailed and accurate knowledge of foreign countries and cultures around the world is the best single indicator of our capacity to confront and solve our urgent international problems constructively. Knowledge does not guarantee that we will solve them constructively, but lack of it makes it likely that we will not." (Almond, 2002))

Not all area studies research can point to immediate benefits, but it is impossible to predict what will and will not be of practical use in the future. Any country can suddenly find itself the focus of international attention and that is when a lack of expertise will show up. One can think of Romania in 1989, when the only professor of Romanian studies in the UK was able to provide expert commentary on TV and in the press based on deep historical, linguistic and cultural knowledge of the country as well as an understanding of current events. Such expertise cannot be built up without access to excellent library resources over many years when the case for providing and funding such a specialist service would not have been obvious. 25 years later the question of migration from Romania and neighbouring countries to the UK has become a matter of public interest, and once again and for very different reasons there is a place for scholars who can aid the public understanding. All academic libraries have to make choices about how they spend their limited funds and it can be hard to justify supporting the study of obscure countries by very small numbers of staff and students, without having a historical perspective on why it might matter, and being able to answer the criticisms that might be made by other parts of the academic community.

### **A brief history of Area Studies**

To understand why Area Studies scholarship has such a controversial history it is necessary to look briefly at its development in the UK and US. This will also help to explain how and why library collections have developed where they have. It is commonly believed and often stated that area studies is a Cold War phenomenon, with all the political baggage that this implies. Certainly the growth of area studies accelerated rapidly after the Second World War, particularly in the US with the passing of the NDEA (National Defense Education Act) in 1958. This established the National Resource Centres in Area Studies, funded under Title VI of the Act and known as Title VI centres, which have been key to the development of area studies in the US ever since. Successive international crises since 1945, including the Korean War, had highlighted the strategic importance of a better understanding of the rest of the world. A fear of falling behind the Soviet Union technologically was brought to a head by the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the NDEA was signed into law the following year and a network of area studies centres was set up across the United States, creating a generation of experts on all parts of the world.

Despite the rapid growth of area studies during the Cold War period its history can be traced back at least to the early years of the twentieth century. Many of the largest and most important centres of area studies research in the UK date from the First World War, when

the collapse of the Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian Empires led to the creation of new nation states with their own languages, cultures and political priorities. At that point in the UK a better understanding of this transformed geopolitical landscape was considered a vital matter of national interest, and that led to the establishment in London of institutions such as the School of Slavonic Studies (founded 1915, and now the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies) and the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1916. In 1920 this was followed by the establishment of what was then the British Institute of international Affairs, later to become the Royal Institute of international Affairs, and now officially known as Chatham House. That institution has been hugely influential in developing interest in and knowledge about other countries in the UK and abroad, and demonstrates that not all world-leading area studies research takes place in universities. Instead it often depends on close working between academics and policy makers, sometimes working in think tanks rather than academic institutions.

Some branches of area studies date back hundreds of years, but they tend to be those which are seen as more central to the standard academic profile of any university, and closely linked to the study of language. Romance studies and Germanic studies have long histories in the UK and the US, dating back at least 250 years. The Librarian for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at UCLA reports that Arabic was taught in 15 universities in the US in 1896, and that the Arabic collections at Harvard date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Hirsch, 2007). The tradition of Oriental studies has a long history in the UK. The Faculty of Oriental studies at Oxford reports on its website that Hebrew and Jewish Studies and Arabic have been taught there for over 400 years. The strength of the library collections at the Bodleian, Sackler and other Oxford libraries are a direct result of that unbroken history.

In 1919 James Henry Breasted founded the Oriental institute at the University of Chicago, with funding from Rockefeller and a core library collection based on the gift of the South Seas collection (now the Wason Collection.) Tansman reports that “by 1935 twenty-five schools offered classes in Japanese studies, though only eight offered courses in language study” and “substantial Japanese language collections had been established in the Library of Congress, Columbia, Harvard, and Berkeley,” (Tansman, 2004). African studies were also underway in the US by the 1930s, through the efforts of Melville J. Herskovits at Northwestern University, whose former students Mary and George Foster were to endow the Africana library established in 1954 and now named after him. Many of these developments were interrupted by the Second World War, but a foundation had been laid that could be built upon in the post-war boom in area studies.

From the beginning the study of area has depended on the study of foreign languages, and in the UK it was the Earl of Onslow, Chair of the Council of the School of Slavonic Studies, who made the case in a letter to the Times in 1936 for the expansion of Russian language teaching in schools, to meet the national interest:

For many years Eastern Europeans have had the advantage of those in the West by being far more familiar with Western conditions than we Westerners were of conditions in Eastern Europe. Knowledge is power, and it is important that we should be as fully equipped with knowledge of the East of Europe as the East is with knowledge of the West. (Onslow, 1936)

The development of Russian language teaching in Britain as described by James Muckle is an interesting example of the range of factors that control the level of interest in a foreign language. He describes the importance of language training for the military, combined with the needs of trade in the big industrial cities, and a growing interest in Russian culture among the educated public, largely fed by the hugely popular literary translations of Constance Garnett. The Taylor institution had been founded in 1835 to teach European languages, but the first professor of Russian was not appointed until William Richard Morfill

took up his post in 1899, the following year making the case in his inaugural lecture for the study of the Slavonic languages (Muckle, 2008)). Progress was still slow, and in 1918 the government commissioned Leathes Report into Modern languages had this to say on the consequences:

Of Russia and Russian the national ignorance was almost complete, though in the last ten years before the war some interest had been awakened. Here there were great opportunities for industrial enterprise, but we left the country too much to the Germans. The future of Russia is even more uncertain than that of Germany, but unless the worst should happen Russia should offer a great opening which can only be used by a nation which has studied, as well as the language of Russia, her social anatomy, the character of her people, her geography, and her economic conditions and capacities" (Leathes, 1918)

This is from the first in a series of government reports issued in the UK throughout the twentieth century looking critically at the degree to which language and area expertise in its schools and universities could meet the national need.

How far the study of a particular country or region is of strategic, political, cultural or social importance to government has always been a key factor in decisions about resourcing both academic activity and the libraries that support it. The connection between area studies and the national interest, however defined, is a recurrent theme in its history. Although the impact of the national interest on funding has sometimes been seen as damaging to the impartiality of academic research, it is this factor that has led to dedicated funding being made available over many years to protect areas of study which simply would not be sustainable if they had to compete on equal terms with the big disciplinary programmes. Equally the need for special pleading has been a risk to the long-term sustainability of particular fields of area studies research as the national interest changes in response to external events. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism changed the nature and the name of what used to be Soviet studies. While there is still a strong national interest in understanding events in Russia it is no longer the first priority for the UK or the US. That position has been overtaken by the events of 9/11 and the subsequent intensified war on terror, with a predictable effect on the relative positions of the two fields of study. For the libraries that support them these shifts in priority have obvious and wide-ranging consequences. It is not only the level of funding that changes, but the disciplines and the languages of study, with enormous consequences for the provision of research materials.

In some cases the existence of large émigré populations have both led to a greater level of interest and provided a pool of expert scholars, language teachers and librarians able to support new areas of research. The successive waves of emigration from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe brought both fresh generations and detailed local knowledge to Russian, Slavonic Studies and East European Studies. In the case of Latin American studies in the US, the large population meant there was demand for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, a factor which tends to make a minority subject area more financially sustainable. While these began between the wars and were supported by Roosevelt in the 1930s with his "Good Neighbor Policy", it was the Cuban Revolution that led to the expansion of Latin American Studies in the 1960s.

The boom in Area Studies after the Second World War was led by the United States, who made a strategic decision to support and fund the study of other countries through Title VI of the NDEA. This policy has remained in place ever since, although the level of funding has varied and is currently at a very low ebb as a result of the financial crisis. As it has done so many times before, the area studies community has had to come together to make the case to government for their importance and for special funding. In the 2012 conference Merks sums up their impact in quantitative terms:

There are currently 127 National Resource Centers for foreign language and international, and area studies....Over the fifty-plus years of the program, NRCs have produced approximately 100,000 PhDs and 300,000 MAs with language and area expertise..... Today there are nine major area studies associations with a combined membership of nearly 20,000 scholars. (Merkx, 2012)

While special pleading has always been a factor in supporting area studies, it is also the case that much useful research has been carried out outside the National Resource Centers. Writing about the development of African studies in the US, Pearl T. Robinson describes the “three worlds” of African studies in the US: “US research universities including the Title VI African Studies Centers; the diaspora including the HBCs in US; and African universities and research networks” (Robinson, 2004). To varying degrees that model applies to most branches of area studies that nowadays strive to bring together these three communities of knowledge.

Since the Second World War area studies has faced huge changes, partly driven by developments in higher education and academic theories, but largely a product of changes in the countries and regions. Soviet studies has become the province of historians rather than Kremlinologists, and the techniques of Kremlinology can now be applied to the study of the few countries such as North Korea where it is the only way to try and interpret events. East European Studies have become Central, East and South-East or Balkan studies and the study of political and economic transition has replaced the study of communist systems and the planned economy. Some countries have more than one place in the area studies map. As members of the European Union many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are studied alongside the older members of the EU, but their languages, literatures and cultures remain in the Slavonic world with their Eastern neighbours. The study of Islamic cultures and countries have come to the fore and African, Latin American and Asian Studies are more important than they have ever been as these regions become more strategically and economically influential. Much of the old terminology remains, as do difficulties of definition and categorisation. Most significant has been the active involvement of academics from the regions and countries being studied. In many cases their input has changed the nature of the discourse, using deep local knowledge to challenge and in some cases overturn the theories which have underpinned Western academic disciplines.

It is hard to quantify the amount of area studies research taking place at any one time. In the 2014 REF exercise referred to above, only 22 UK universities made a submission to the area studies panel. This compares with 83 that submitted to the history panel, and 101 to the business and management panel. 483 staff were submitted, including 98 early career researchers. This is ahead of classics, with 383 staff submitted; theology with 413; and civil and construction engineering, with 390; but when one considers the breadth of the research that could be fit HEFCE's definition the numbers seem surprisingly small. There is good reason to believe that not all area studies research in the UK is reflected in the numbers submitted to the REF, as much will be included in submissions to the main disciplinary panels. It is likely that some area studies research was included in the panels for all the social science and humanities disciplines, which all returned much large numbers. To take just one discipline that usually includes research on the world beyond the UK, there were 1786 staff submitted to the history panel (REF 2014, 2014). It is unwise to draw too many conclusions from a process such as the REF, where the choice of submissions and of the panel will be a strategic decision by each university, and success or failure in playing that particular game affects future funding, but the strikingly small numbers do indicate that area studies remains a minority interest. If that is true for the field as a whole then the numbers of researchers working on any particular region will be tiny and concentrated in just a few institutions, and that creates challenges both for the sustainability of particular centres of research and for the libraries supporting them.

## Area Studies today

What then are the common elements that characterise modern area studies research? It tends to be concerned with countries and regions perceived to be in some way different, less well understood, or of strategic importance. It brings together researchers from a range of different disciplinary backgrounds and with different theoretical approaches from those disciplines, often combined with a deep knowledge of a country or region and its language. It aims to generate new knowledge that can contribute to the development of the core disciplines. More and more nowadays it tries to address global problems. It can be comparative in its scope, cutting across regional boundaries to address common issues. It might compare the political institutions of former totalitarian states, or the rising economies of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Alongside those scholars there might be others working on Russian film, or Japanese literature. Often it is the social scientists who have the highest profile, as their work can be presented as important to the national interest. There is usually a core of humanities research that continues irrespective of the national need as defined by government or funding bodies.

The characteristics of contemporary area studies, at least as practised in the UK, were set out clearly in the 2005 Oxford workshop. The participants identified a number of difficulties including that of nomenclature, both for the subject matter and for individual academics. Most area studies scholars do not describe themselves as such, but are much more likely to define themselves by their discipline as that is better understood in the academy, and is a better match for the departmental structures of most universities. Some area research will be carried out by lone scholars, based in disciplinary departments and cut off from others with an interest in the same part of the world working elsewhere. Those posts can be vulnerable, as the departure of the lone foreign specialist from a disciplinary department can mean the permanent loss of that research area, leaving expertise on that country in the institution as a whole impoverished. It can also be hard for those not based in a strong area studies department to take advantage of funding opportunities. As a field of research area studies is often an awkward fit within an institution and is not well understood, leading to periodic attempts by the area studies community to redefine itself and justify its existence. It tends to be seen as rather niche and outside the mainstream.

Given the enormous number of potential combinations of region country, language and discipline, the task for any library in supporting area studies research might seem impossible. In practice librarians are rather unlikely to encounter the term “area studies” in their daily work. It tends to be reserved for conferences and publications concerned with analysing itself as a scholarly field rather than with the academic work of its scholarly community. It is much more likely that their institutions will contain scholars working within one or more of the regional divisions, such as Slavic or Slavonic Studies, Asian Studies, African Studies, Latin American, or European studies (and many variants on these) as these tend to be the names given to research centres or academic departments within universities and to academic organisations representing area studies scholars. One prominent exception is the University of Oxford, which in 2004 set up the School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies with the aim of bringing together the scattered communities of scholars working on different areas and giving them a stronger voice, and budget holding powers, within the University. It was also partly an answer to a criticism in the early Research Assessment Exercise that some of the disciplinary departments were too Eurocentric. That model is a powerful one, but unusual.

The range of academic disciplines represented within any area studies unit is likely to be different from institution to institution. Often the social sciences predominate, including economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science, with the last having a particularly strong tradition of area studies. In some institutions the study of history, literature and the arts will also be drawn in to area studies groupings where they exist. If they do not exist then

the study of an unusual literature or culture might be attached rather incongruously to a disciplinary department, meaning that scholars working on a country or region within a university can feel isolated. Some countries and regions are much more likely to be studied than others, and which they are will change unpredictably according to external factors ranging from war to major cultural developments. In addition to a country or regional focus and a disciplinary focus the third element is usually the one of language. Many area studies scholars have a good knowledge of the language or languages of the region or country they are studying, and are dependent to a greater or lesser extent on resources in that language. This is particularly but not only true of humanities scholars. Others will have a wider geographical focus and rely more heavily on English language sources, where they exist. In either case it is very unlikely that the sources they need will be available in even the best resourced academic libraries supporting the traditional disciplines without special efforts being made. Identifying and supplying the major academic publications is unlikely to be enough to support serious area studies research, because it misses so much of the essential context. Any academic library that has developed to support the traditional disciplines of the academy will find that their collection does have an implicit geographical bias based on Anglo-American and European culture. It is very unlikely to extend to cover primary sources, official publications, ephemera and empirical data of all kinds from other parts of the world, in languages other than English. Filling that gap is a substantial challenge for any academic library.

## 2. Area studies librarianship

### **Abstract:**

This chapter shows how area studies librarianship as a career differs significantly from subject librarianship, requiring detailed knowledge of a country and language alongside professional skills. The skills needed are not generally taught in library schools, causing problems with succession planning. Institutional fit can be a problem, as can isolation. Some libraries have solved this by creating teams of area studies librarians with junior staff supporting them. The changing agenda in research support is adding new tasks and creating new structures. Area studies librarians are well placed to support the international agenda of their universities.

**Keywords:** recruitment, training, careers, succession planning, institutional fit, teams, research support, skills, structures, internationalization.

### **Recruitment and training**

The rapid growth of area studies research in the second half of the twentieth century was accompanied by the establishment of posts in many academic libraries designated as area studies librarians. Titles varied and the term bibliographer was often used, reflecting an understandable emphasis on collection building. Although having some features in common with that of a subject librarian, the role was also significantly different. It would usually be focused almost entirely on acquisition, which required excellent linguistic skills and specialist knowledge of the publishing industry of a particular part of the world. Good contacts in the region would be essential, and buying trips abroad could be a regular part of the work. With many countries the time-consuming nurturing of exchange arrangements would be the only way to build a research collection, and success would depend on building a network of personal contacts in libraries and publishing houses abroad. A spirit of adventure was normally a requirement for the role. The most extreme example of this can be seen outside the university sector, in the experience of those who set up and ran the Library of Congress Overseas Offices. Established in the 1960s and still functioning in Rio de Janeiro, Nairobi, Cairo, Islamabad, New Delhi, and Jakarta, they were charged with seeking out and acquiring publications from as far afield as possible. In an article looking back at the experience, the Director of the Office in Rio de Janeiro describes the daily routine:

All in a day's work, the quest may range from a rickety old building in the Tropics that surely will not withstand the next hurricane to an ultra modern national bank with the tightest security imaginable and on to the dilapidated headquarters of a society for the protection of prostitutes and their children. Just coming in or leaving work can often be a challenge as several of the offices are located in embassies or consulates that periodically serve as targets for peaceful, or rowdy, political demonstrations. When that happens, the building will be temporarily closed with no one allowed to exit or enter. (Howard-Reguindin, 2004)

Experiences like this were only open to very few, but many successful area studies librarians would travel abroad from time to time as that would be by far the most effective way of identifying and acquiring publications. They would usually be expected to teach the specialist bibliography of their specialist country or region, and many area studies librarians were well-known and highly valued in the academic world for their bibliographic expertise. In fact many remained closely identified with an academic role, coming to their role with a PhD but without a professional library qualification, and retaining an academic profile alongside their identity as a librarian. Traditionally they were highly qualified academically, often with their own scholarly reputations. A striking example of this model is described in an article entitled "My life in libraries", by the eminent Slavic librarian, now Professor, Marianna Tax Choldin. She describes the "exciting and gratifying" work of building a Slavic collection at the University of Illinois, hunting out the most obscure items for researchers, often after many months of



searching (Choldin, 2009). Initially appointed without a library qualification, she went on to gain a PhD in Russian and librarianship. Among other significant academic achievements, she became President of the academic organization for Slavic Studies in the US, worked hard to develop the national bibliography of Slavic Studies, and was active in building international links both within Russia and with Slavic scholars and librarians across Europe. In 1989 she was appointed Mortenson Professor for International Library programs at the University of Illinois, and she went on to create the Mortenson Center for international Library Programs, which still facilitates international collaboration between librarians. Such a career would be always be hard to emulate but it is not clear that the route she followed would be available today, as generic professional skills have come to the fore, relegating expertise in a particular subject or area to a secondary role, if it has a role at all. Professor Choldin's career is just one of a number of impressive careers based on area studies librarianship and exemplifies the close relationship with the academic world that has always been a feature of this branch of librarianship. This has worked in both directions. The current and long-serving Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington, is also a famous cultural historian of Russia.

Recruitment and succession planning in area studies librarianship has been the subject of much debate in the profession over recent years, reflecting and running alongside the debates in area studies itself. Recruiting somebody with the requisite area knowledge, languages, professional skills and qualifications has always been difficult and could sometimes be impossible. This has led to questions about the priority that should be given to each element when recruiting. In 1996 Deborah Jakubs, now University Librarian and Vice Provost for Library Affairs at Duke University, addressed this issue in a piece entitled "Modernizing Mycroft", which looked at the future of area studies librarianship. She states unambiguously her belief that "the solid core of area skills is the heavier component of the area librarian's expertise, and that library knowledge must be built upon that core, not the other way around." (Jakubs, 1996). That approach has led to several attempts to create career paths aimed at converting academics into area librarians. One such programme at Indiana University was funded by the Mellon Foundation in the 1990s. The Mellon Post-doctoral Fellowship in Librarianship was based on an internship model, whereby graduate students served an apprenticeship alongside area librarians. One of the graduates of the programme wrote about it as a positive experience, but says that the programme ultimately failed because none of the graduates was successful in when applying for a professional library job supporting area studies (Kuntz, 2003). The model simply did not fit with the standard recruitment requirements of an academic library. Those libraries that were prepared to be flexible to get the best available candidate would sometimes find themselves obliged to specify the library qualification as desirable rather than essential. Unless addressed by support for further training once the applicant has taken up the post, this can be seen as both limiting the future career prospects of these staff and undermining the professional nature of the work, but might be the only way to fill the post with a capable candidate. Flexibility might also be necessary to be take advantage of the growing pool of candidates from abroad or from émigré families, whose qualifications might be less familiar but who will bring with them good linguistic and area knowledge to add to their professional skills, and who can be trained in local working practices. Waves of migration to Europe, the UK and the US, have traditionally been a source of expertise in scholarship and in librarianship.

The question of training for area librarianship has been a matter of concern for many years. In 1995 it was addressed at a conference in the US on the future of area studies librarianship, at a time when the level of Title VI funding was under threat, as it is again now. The generation of area librarians appointed with the expansion of area studies after World War Two (and particularly Title VI funding in the US) was starting to retire, and questions were asked about where the new generation was going to come from. Dedicated training was then available in some US and UK library schools. Responses to a survey carried out

of US library schools for the conference showed that six offered courses aimed at training future area specialist librarians. Examples quoted included "Southeast Asian Bibliography," "Pacific Islands Information Sources," and "Seminar in Latin American Library Studies." Two dual degrees were offered in area studies and librarianship, at the University of Hawaii and Indiana University. (Krutulis, 1995). Since that survey the situation has become worse. Many of the programmes that existed then are no longer running, and there is no clear training path for a prospective area studies librarian. The problems identified in 1995 were addressed again in 2013 at a conference on area and international studies librarianship at Indiana University under the title "Collaboration, Advocacy and Recruitment: area and international studies librarianship". The questions posed there were set in the context of increased internationalisation of universities over the intervening years, and a greater potential role for librarians with "global competencies". Discussion covered issues such as how such librarians were to be trained, whether internships and fellowships were the right model or library schools could fill the gap despite low student demand, and whether area knowledge or professional skills were more important to academic libraries. A lack of hard evidence about the nature of the duties asked of area specialist librarians was highlighted. In 2013 a glance at the American Library Association searchable database of programs shows a complete absence of area librarianship of its subdivisions in its lists of areas of concentration/career pathways within ALA-accredited programs. Most are based around generic functional skills, but the following subject pathways are the only ones listed: health sciences librarianship, law librarianship, music librarianship, and science librarianship. A prospective student hoping for a career in area librarianship could only search institution by institution under the heading "academic librarianship" but would be unlikely to find a dedicated programme. The situation is no better in the UK, where a blank would also be drawn. In 2005 the Slavic librarian Michael Brewer wrote about the lack of training in area studies librarianship, under the title "you can't get there from here". He did manage to find some cause for optimism and identified some routes through the US qualification system that would allow for training in both Slavic studies and librarianship. This was usually in the form of joint masters programs. He points out that a really determined candidate could create their own training programme by taking such a route, but that in practice most had always learnt their skills once in post. His survey of colleagues in the Slavic field shows that:

nearly forty percent of Slavic librarians had their first professional library position in an area other than Slavic. It is interesting to note, however, that this is the case for only a quarter of those with advanced degrees in a Slavic-related field. Academic credentials, it seems, do open doors. Focused on-the-job experience, however, should not be underestimated. Nearly half of all respondents, it turns out, had apprenticed, interned, or worked as Slavic support staff before getting their first professional library position. (M. Brewer, 2005)

The reference to Slavic support staff implies a team of library staff supporting Slavic studies, with junior posts available to carry out processing and other clerical tasks. This is more likely in a large specialist area studies library or a library service with an area studies department, and is a function highlighted as essential by one librarian writing under the title "acquisitions globalized" (Ward, 2009). Judit Ward from Rutgers University points out the need for junior library staff with appropriate language skills who are capable, for example, of unpacking a box of Chinese books, matching them to an order and an invoice, claiming missing items, and searching a bibliographic database for a record, if such a record exists. The consequences of not having such expertise on hand she describes from personal experience simply as "nightmarish". A pool of staff with these skills is less likely in a centralised library where all cataloguing and processing is carried out in one large unit, separated from the academic liaison and collection development staff. In the latter scenario the opportunities for staff development from a junior entry-level position into a specialist role are much more limited, and with the decrease in formal training programs vacancies for area studies librarians have become increasingly difficult to fill.

The lack of training opportunities inevitably exacerbates problems with recruitment, leading to a lack of suitably qualified staff capable of undertaking these increasingly demanding and varied roles. It is difficult nowadays to analyse job vacancies retrospectively as electronic publication means they are no longer systematically and publicly archived as they were when they were published in professional journals. In addition, as a result of the difficult financial situation over the last few years more vacancies have been the result of restructuring processes and thus only advertised internally. Much evidence is therefore anecdotal, but one piece of research analysing vacancies in Latin American librarianship from 1970 to 2007 in the United States does demonstrate the trend. Requirements included, unsurprisingly, an advanced degree in a relevant subject, a professional qualification, and strong language skills in relevant languages alongside the ability to teach. Over the period the range of duties associated with each post had increased significantly (Alonso-Regalado, Jesus and Van Ullen, 2009). Although the authors are careful to point out that this analysis is based on a relatively small and incomplete sample it corresponds closely to the experience of colleagues attempting to apply for or fill such posts over the last few years. The model of the scholar librarian who used his or her academic expertise to build the collections has gone, but in practice the skills that person had are still needed. They have just been supplemented by an ever increasing range of professional skills. Recruiting libraries often have to decide between candidates who match only some of the relevant criteria, in the hope that other skills can be learnt on the job. The solution now seen more and more often is to recruit someone with minimal language and regional knowledge and rely on their generic professional skills to cope. Some of course rise magnificently to the challenge, but in this model it is also not unusual to add more and more languages and countries to their duties, meaning that the Library support received by researchers in those areas cannot avoid becoming reactive rather than proactive.

In many universities with small numbers of researchers working on a particular country or region, it can be hard to justify making a specialist appointment at all. One solution used by some universities to allow for limited access to expertise in language and area was described by the Executive Director of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, a partnership of fifteen US universities, at the conference at Duke University in December 2012 on "Global Dimensions of Scholarship and research libraries: a forum on the future." She described the CIC Shared Japanese Studies Librarian project, whereby a group of three research libraries (Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) share a specialist post. The post-holder is housed at one institution and visits the other two twice a year, using technology to communicate between institutions. This has some clear advantages for the libraries and for potential applicants in that it means a full-time post becomes possible where otherwise there might have been no post at all, although, as she points out, its success depends like any institutional partnership on trust and shared goals (Allen, 2012). Libraries that could not justify a full-time position to support a particular country or region would get the benefit of access to a specialist member of staff. It obviously works best where there is already a strong tradition of collaboration between libraries and their partner institutions within a region. Balancing the differing needs of each institution's academic community must be difficult for any individual in this position, as must also be fitting into the staffing structure and building relationships with colleagues in three libraries.

#### Area librarianship in the staffing structure

The question of fit into a library's staff structure is one that has caused problems for area librarians over the years, even if they are not trying to service the needs of several different universities at the same time. Staff can feel isolated and that their role is not well understood. They will tend to work closely with their academic communities and feel that their skills are less understood within the Library. This can cause them to feel distanced from their library colleagues, and can lead to accusations that they have "gone native". They can

find themselves supporting disciplines in area studies for which there is already a dedicated subject librarian, and it is not clear to them, or, critically, to their research community, where the divisions lie between their roles, or how to manage the overlap. These problems are described clearly in a 2011 article by the Slavic studies librarian at the Miami University of Ohio. She emphasises the difficulty of understanding her role in relation to the disciplinary division of the subject librarians. She identifies challenges in acquisitions, the need to acquire special collections and donations, often working alongside academic staff, and the need to support inter- and trans-disciplinary research, and she perceives a lack of understanding of the nature of area studies within the university and the library structure. As she says: "Collection development, liaison responsibilities, and instruction are very different in Area Studies and involve more diverse and innovative approaches to librarianship." (Misco, 2011). She describes how the creation of a working group of area librarians within her library, focusing on collection management, had allowed some of these issues to be addressed and had led to greater understanding and more productive working relationships between the different groups of staff.

Although the detail of the work of a Slavic studies librarian might be different from that of his or her colleague in Latin American or African studies, it is clear that many of the generic issues will be the same and there is potential for useful collaborations. Deborah Jakubs has described how the area librarians at Duke University were brought together in 1991 into an International and Area Studies Team. In addition to the area librarians this team also has "affiliated" members with other subject responsibilities. Interestingly she sees one advantage of this structure being the way it has served as "a very useful mechanism for involving the library as a player in the university's internationalization efforts." (Jakubs, 1996). Although written almost twenty years ago this is at least as relevant now, and demonstrates rather well how forward thinking many area librarians have been.

One tricky question of institutional fit relates to the way languages, countries and regions are divided up and allocated to library staff. In a chapter on selecting library materials in the Romance languages, two specialist staff (Sartori & Larson, 2007) point out the oddity that Romanian is traditionally the responsibility of the Slavonic librarian, despite it being a Romance language. As so often, the reason is one of practicality and based on long-standing practice. An understanding of the oddities and difficulties of the book trade in the Communist bloc countries would have been vital in acquiring publications. There would also have been a better match to the research community, as Romania was much more likely to be studied alongside other Communist or post-Communist countries and would logically be best supported by the same person who supported that region. Now that Romania is part of the European Union it is still most likely to be studied alongside its post-socialist neighbours, despite the fact that in most academic libraries support for Romance languages fall very much in the traditional disciplinary model, supported by a subject librarian rather than an area specialist. A subject librarian will buy French publications, but does that subject librarian also buy material in French from Canada, or is that the responsibility of the American Studies librarian, if there is one? The same question, of course, applies to many other combinations of language and country, and although language knowledge is vital when selecting material, many area studies librarians support such a wide range of countries with so many languages that it would be impossible for anyone to have even the most minimal knowledge of more than a few of them. How is an African studies librarian meant to know the 2,000 languages spoken on that continent? In the end knowledge of a specific language takes second place to related language skills, a good knowledge of the region and an understanding of the way research into that region is developing. Odd gaps can develop with this approach, as some languages and regions could easily fall between specialist staff. At an institutional level that might not matter, but nationally it can lead to a shortage of expertise and of resources. The precise scope of any particular area librarian's role is likely to depend on the way that area is studied in a particular institution. North Africa might be studied with the Middle East in one institution, and with the rest of Africa in another. This is quite unlike

the experience of a subject librarian, who could reasonably expect the experience gained as a science librarian or a history librarian to translate very closely between libraries. In institutions with small groups of researchers working on less-studied countries the tendency can be to employ part-time specialist staff with expertise just in that country, essentially to select the books. This can mean that the researchers might not have easy access to the full range of research support that they need from their Library.

It seems clear that the ideal model for staff in place capable of supporting a multitude of areas, countries and languages at the appropriate level seems to be to bring together area studies staff into a unit with more junior staff who can support them and be their eventual successors. That way the risk of a single isolated expert who might leave and cannot be replaced is reduced, gaps in coverage and expertise can be more easily identified and filled, and it becomes possible for some sharing of skills, while allowing scope for staff development. Good links with subject librarians supporting disciplines are essential to allow a coordinated approach to supporting disciplines within area studies. In some of the larger research universities in the UK and the US this sort of structure is possible, particularly where there are specialist area studies libraries. It means that staff with experience of a range of support roles, such as cataloguing and processing, will be accustomed to supporting scholars working with international materials. Any library faced with supporting a new international agenda might want to consider whether their staffing structure is designed to equip staff with the skills and support to meet those new demands.

### Skills and the changing agenda in research support

What skills do specialist librarians need in the twenty first century to support area studies research? The traditional model of research support in most universities has focused on four areas: collection management, academic liaison, information skills training, and dealing with specialist enquiries. For many years these have formed the core of the job description of the subject librarian supporting the work of one or more academic departments. He or she has selected print and electronic resources according to the research profile of a department, and ensured that the collection, whether on the shelves or virtual, remains current and capable of meeting the research needs of staff and research students, within any budgetary constraints that might apply. The subject librarian will represent the Library to the department and the department back to the Library, often through a system of academic representatives and by membership of formal committees, but also by building up personal contacts with individual scholars. Information skills training has been an increasing part of the role over the last decade or so, aimed at students at all levels, but with a particular focus on research students in an effort to meet the formal requirements of funders. Providing a specialist enquiry service is a valued part of the role in many cases, although it is probably true that it is less used as researchers have more direct access to resources.

In the UK this model is currently undergoing review and in some universities has been abandoned altogether, in an attempt to address a multitude of new priorities. These are set out clearly in a recent RLUK report by Mary Auckland on “Re-skilling for Research” (Auckland, 2012), which identifies many new areas of work that should also be within the remit of the subject librarian, and nine areas where there is a skills gap that needs addressing. These new skills include the ability to advise on digital preservation of research outputs, data management and curation, open access requirements from funders, the use of data manipulation tools, data mining, and metadata standards. This is a daunting list and how it should be addressed is a huge issue for the profession. Whatever the answer is in terms of the distribution of responsibilities among library staff, an awareness of all these issues must be essential for anyone charged with supporting research in a university. They reflect the inescapable challenges created by the revolution in academic publishing and scholarly communication, and they all apply just as much to area studies research as to the traditional disciplines.

The role of librarian who supports an area studies department or centre has always been significantly different in one way from that of the subject librarian supporting academics working in a single discipline. For the area specialist librarian, the primary focus is much less likely to be on the subject or subjects being studied, than on the languages and some understanding of the country or region. Without at least a basic grounding in those things the core functions of collection management become extremely difficult, if not impossible. The area specialist librarian without some knowledge of the relevant languages is handicapped at all levels and will struggle to deal with suppliers and resources on one hand, and with the needs of researchers on the other, whether those are traditional enquiries about resources or are focused on some of the newer areas listed above. In most universities a high level of linguistic fluency is not essential and good linguists with a background in one language should be able to work easily in cognate languages, but a background in and aptitude for language acquisition is essential. A survey of Slavic librarians in the US shows an impressive level of linguistic expertise:

Wide-ranging linguistic competency seems to be one of the hall- marks of the Slavic librarian. More than two-thirds have a working knowledge of at least four languages beyond their native tongues and a majority is asked to work at least monthly with materials in one or more of the non-Slavic languages of Eastern Europe or the Former Soviet Republics or both. (M. Brewer, 2005)

Similarly an understanding of the culture and history of the countries or regions in question is a basic requirement. With both of those in place the librarian should be able to use his or her professional skills in information management and retrieval to support whatever range of academic disciplines have combined locally under the general rubric of area studies. There is obviously a danger that as university libraries restructure themselves to address all the new areas of research support, these core skills will be lost in the structure, and it will be harder to meet the needs of what can easily appear to be a minority or peripheral interest. This is even more likely if interest in particular areas or countries is not brought together within the university in any formal way, but scattered between departments, with a historian of China, for example, in the history department, while somebody studying the economics and business of modern China is in the economics department. They will have in common a need for research resources which can be hard to identify and to acquire, and the library needs to be able to be able to meet that need to the same extent as it meets the needs of a historian or economist working on Britain or the US. The RLUK report makes the point that failure to provide the specialist resources that researchers need constitutes “a real barrier to effective research”. The experience that area studies researchers have interacting with library systems and managing their research information will also be significantly different and will need to be identified specifically in any information skills training or support. Standard web pages or training sessions about copyright or searching the catalogue are unlikely to help them unless specifically tailored for their needs. The chapter on user support and services deals with these issues in greater depth.

In many ways the area specialist librarian is already addressing a broader range of research support issues than the traditional subject librarian, if only because he or she will be the focus for all the issues that their research community encounters, whether that is struggling to deal with foreign character sets in reference management software, or trying to establish the copyright status of something published abroad. They are likely to serve as an essential bridge between researchers and the library on such technical matters as understanding and advising on cataloguing standards, transliteration and original script cataloguing, authority control, searching across library systems and databases in multiple languages and scripts. Some have become involved in creating new digital resources, often in collaboration with partners abroad. The rise of the Digital Humanities has led to new opportunities for specialist librarians to become involved in projects to create new scholarly resources. In addition area librarians often have a public and promotional role on behalf of their institutions, promoting

collections, greeting high level visitors, and helping international staff and students. These areas of work are all covered in more detail in subsequent chapters. The skills needed to meet these demands across multiple disciplines form a good basis for the skills needed to support new models for research being developed in many universities. Inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research bringing together researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds to address global issues will throw up many of the same problems that researchers working together from different disciplinary backgrounds on “obscure” countries in “difficult” languages have always faced.

So what are the specific priorities for research support in area studies? Most librarians supporting area studies will immediately name issues around acquisition as their biggest challenge, and this is unlikely to change in the near future. Issues around acquiring and maintaining the collection remain at the heart of the work, if only because so many of the time-saving solutions now in place for Anglo-American material are of no use if the bulk of your collection is published abroad. The “just in case” model for library acquisitions has come under much criticism for very good reasons to do with managing space and the life-cycle costs of housing book stocks that are not heavily used, but if research monographs are published in short print runs and will be unobtainable if not bought straight away, the decision making process is more difficult. Relevant electronic resources are likely to be very expensive and to be used by only a small group of researchers, so negotiating a good deal and making the case for the expenditure is harder than it might be for a key resource in one of the big disciplines.

In all areas of research support academic liaison is becoming ever more important as the issues become more complex, and area studies is no different in that respect. It can be a considerable challenge to ensure that a group of academics who share an interest in a particular country or region, but work in entirely different disciplines, can all be supported by a single member of library staff having to understand and balance their needs. The problem is exacerbated by the growing demand for skills training for research students, as it is hard to produce a programme that is specific enough to meet the needs of students all working in different disciplines, and in many area studies centres working on different countries as well, even if they are in the same general region. What does a research student working on Polish poetry have in common with one studying the place of Bulgaria in the European Union, and how can they both be equally supported and included in the same training session delivered by the same person?

Beyond the basics of providing the collection, answering enquiries on it, and training research students in its use, the area studies librarian will almost certainly need a range of other expertise. Area studies centres tend to be rare beasts, and relevant high quality collections are scattered. Good contacts with other area studies librarians and knowledge of other useful collections both locally and abroad, are very likely to be needed. Increasingly no single library can meet all the research needs of any group of academics, but in area studies it is considerably less likely than in more mainstream subjects that a neighbouring library or a convenient document delivery scheme will be able to fill the gap. Primary sources, government publications, statistics and news media are all key components of an area studies collection, and need to be made available, often at what can appear to be disproportionate cost to the amount of use that will be made of them, if judged in purely formulaic terms. Major digital collections of foreign language material are becoming increasingly available for some countries, both through commercial suppliers and through national libraries. The role and services of the relevant national library will need to be well understood. Archives and specialist collections often feature largely in area studies research and a familiarity with those will be important for anybody working with historians and specialists in culture. A really good knowledge of collections worldwide and an engagement with acquisitions procedures are both essential.

Much of the writing on area librarianship focuses for obvious reasons on collection development, and it is in meeting the challenges of that activity that many area librarians develop their broader skills. In the introduction to their volume on "Building area studies collections" two experienced area studies librarians point out the benefits to the individuals and beyond:

"the best area studies librarians are prominent in their fields, enjoy a broad and also intimate knowledge of scholarship and publishing within their region of specialization, and actively foster cooperative ventures across both institutional and national boundaries" (Hazen & Spohrer, 2007).

At the 1995 conference on the future of area studies librarianship an attempt was made to define the skills that were needed, and they look remarkably relevant now:

Area librarians need to maintain and expand knowledge of area studies as traditionally defined, and become familiar with other fields including law, business, the applied sciences, and interdisciplinary areas. They also need to become computer literate at a general level, familiar with the content of online databases, be able to navigate the Internet and create Web tools, understand the impact of electronic resources on publishing, and apply new technologies in collection development, technical, and public services. The acquisition of grant-writing and fund-raising skills also are high priority. For some area librarians management and cross-cultural communication skills are needed. (Schmidt, 1995)

That list is still entirely relevant, and although there are skills that could be added to it there is nothing there that could be taken away. Since that conference area librarians have been active in a range of international digital projects, and have more recently become involved in the digital humanities. One former Slavic Librarian, Aaron Trehub, now Director of Library Technology at Auburn University in Alabama, is optimistic about the profession. In an article looking back over his career and the history of Slavic librarianship he sees that despite the relative decline of Slavic studies from its heyday during the Cold War, he sees it "coping rather well" with some new appointments and, most critically, a growth in digital projects. His advice for Slavic librarians applies to all those in such roles:

I would say that the single most important development in that time has been a shift in emphasis from curation to creation. That is, from acting as the organizers and stewards of content created by other people and agencies to becoming content creators in our own right. Stewardship and preservation of the materials entrusted to us is an honorable and important job, now perhaps more than ever. But I would like to see us—and here I rejoin temporarily the ranks of practicing Slavic librarians—get more involved as a profession in designing and producing digital scholarship." (Trehub, 2009)

At the 1995 conference James G. Neal, currently Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian at Columbia University, made the case that it is area studies librarians who are best placed to support the new global agenda. He quotes an ARL Director:

I believe that the golden age of area specialists was not in the 1960s or in the 1970s but has yet to come. The increasingly global interest combined with the expanding magnitude and ever more complex nature of our information universe will make the area librarian's job more evidently than ever before that of efficiently and effectively sifting through the information universe to tailor it to the individual's needs. Who other than the area librarian can do this?" (Neal, 1995)



This amounts to a daunting skill set for librarians supporting area studies. The traditional skills in collection development are needed more than ever to cope with the acquisition and management of research material in an ever-growing range of disciplines, languages and formats, including archives, special collections, audio-visual material, government publications, ephemera, and statistics, alongside print and electronic books, journals and grey literature. They need to be excellent advocates for the Library and for their research communities, able to liaise with researchers across a wide range of disciplines, potentially from literature to medicine, and provide skills training in area and language resources, while ensuring that discipline and generic skills needs are met. They need to be up to date with trends in scholarly communication, have an excellent technical understanding and an awareness of international legal issues. Skills in bid writing and project management are increasingly necessary. To achieve all of this they need to draw on the skills of colleagues, both within their own library and more widely. Many area librarians are excellent at professional networking, playing an active role in national and international groups developed to ease the isolation of being the lone local expert, and this provides a useful body of expertise to call upon to help meet some of these demands, but it is obvious that a single individual cannot fulfil all these roles on their own. Ultimately area librarians need to act together, ideally both within an institution and nationally, to be the voice of their academic communities, expressing and explaining their needs.

Taken together, all these factors, combined with the myriad new demands coming into play, mean that providing the highest quality support for area studies research potentially involves the entire library, and needs input from staff with the widest possible range of skills. This is a large commitment if it is viewed only as supporting minority research areas such as area studies, but as universities become increasingly international in their staff and student recruitment and in their attempts to address global questions, the advantages are much wider. Those area specialist library staff with experience and knowledge of supporting country-specific, regional and global research have a great deal to contribute to the international strategy of the institution, benefiting students and staff across all disciplines. Getting it right sets a challenge for institutions and for professional training programmes, but would have advantages for the international image of the library and university as a whole. A research library can only become truly global if internationalisation is a priority across all areas of its work, and it is the area studies librarians who have the experience and the evidence to show what needs to be done.

### 3 Area studies collections 1: Acquisitions.

#### **Abstract:**

This chapter sets out the challenges that still apply to acquiring overseas publications in a wide range of formats, a role that still dominates area studies librarianship and is still valued by researchers. Difficulties with languages and areas of responsibility, budgets and payments, and vendors, are outlined. National initiatives set up to help address these are described. Barriers to successful acquisition are listed and consideration is given to the ethics of acquiring overseas publications.

**Keywords:** acquisition, selection, languages, budgets, finance, vendors, ethics, barriers, primary sources, just-in-case, just-in-time, national initiatives, PL-480.

There are many new roles in the area of research and teaching support being actively undertaken within the profession by libraries and librarians, but ask academic staff what service they value most from their university library, as Research Libraries UK and Ithaka S & R did in 2012, and the answer was clear: the role of the library as purchaser of content is still the one that is valued most highly by the academic community in the UK and the US. The US survey has consistently shown this role as most highly valued since 2003, and although the 2012 survey shows a decline for the first time, for reasons that are not clear, it still shows 80% of respondents valuing this above all other roles (Housewright & Schonfeld, 2013a). As 2012 was the first time the survey had been carried out in the UK no equivalent comparisons can be made over time, but the results are even more striking.

In all disciplinary groupings, the role that was rated as very important by the largest share of respondents was that “the library pays for resources I need, from academic journals to books to electronic databases.” Almost 90% of respondents indicated that this “buyer” role is very important. (Housewright & Schonfeld, 2013b)

This response represents the view of almost 3,500 academics in UK universities across all disciplines, and it shows a clear lead of almost 20% above all other library functions asked about, including support for teaching. The impact of open access publishing and other free resources has not yet made a significant difference to the results, although it might be behind the slight dip in the American results. What is clear is that there have been huge changes in the acquisition process over the last few years, and it is easy to understand why the explosion in electronic publishing, with its big deals and expensive databases, has made academic researchers more dependent on libraries than they would have been in the past, when they could possibly buy the books they need, and even have personal subscriptions to a few key print journals. Researchers looking for Anglo-American material in the humanities and social sciences to support their research in area studies will benefit as much as any other community from the big disciplinary and multi-disciplinary resources that most academic libraries do their best to supply as a matter of course.

It is inevitable that this new publishing landscape has led to an increased centralisation of the acquisitions process in most academic libraries. The complexities of licensing electronic content, often at enormous cost to the institution, managing big deals for electronic journals and databases, and the growth of patron-driven-acquisition for e-books, have all required increased technical expertise in the management of acquisitions, which tends to be centred on a few key specialist roles that pose a constant challenge in keeping up with such a fast changing environment. The continuing change in scholarly communication and publishing models means that the attention of most senior managers in acquisitions is firmly focused on the horizon. In a difficult financial climate, value for money has also become more important than ever and apparently easier to measure, with the cost per download something that can be calculated and used to justify the cost of the resources, the service and the staff needed to support it. Subject librarians, where they still exist, continue to select print publications and influence the purchase of electronic resources, but this part of their role is clearly diminishing.

As staffing structures relating to selection and acquisition in many academic libraries go through a state of transition it is as yet unclear how far the process of centralisation will go and what its impact will be on any library's ability to understand and meet the needs of its research community. In some academic libraries subject librarians continue to be the link with academic departments and are involved to varying degrees in the selection of research resources, but in other libraries that role no longer exists and the staff are arranged entirely by function. It seems inevitable that it is in the smaller, more specialist and more complex areas such as area studies that a centralised approach such as this will struggle the most. Where traditional close communication links are broken it is hard to see how the voices of small numbers of researchers working in what can be seen as niche areas can be heard. There has been much concern from the subject librarian communities in the UK about new staffing models and changes to their roles, but there is as yet little hard evidence either way about any impact on the quality of the service to researchers and the quality of the research collections.

In this fast-changing environment area studies librarians often find themselves needing to defend their role and to explain the particular demands of their work. Any area specialist librarian will say that of all their multiple responsibilities the most challenging issue they deal with is that of acquisitions, and when they say this they are normally talking about the acquisition of material from the region or country of study. Before moving on to consider why this remains such a challenge, it is worth remembering that these librarians also often have an important role in selecting Anglo-American and disciplinary resources and representing their research communities when decisions are made centrally about expensive electronic resources. This can be a very significant role because of the wide range of disciplines that they might be supporting, and because the particular focus of the research might be quite different from that being carried out within a disciplinary department in the same institution. The literature of area studies librarianship has little to say about this role but as area studies research is rooted in discipline it has to be a cornerstone of library support. Ideally the process of supporting those disciplines will take place in close collaboration with relevant subject librarians for the particular disciplines alongside central acquisitions staff.

## **Selection**

It is when it comes to the selection and acquisition of research resources from or about the country or region of study that the process can be troublesome, to say the least, and place what can seem like disproportionate demands on library functions in terms of staff time and effort, even if the purchase price of any individual item is low. The problems start with selection, and defining what to collect in terms of subject, format and language. It will be necessary first of all to understand the disciplines covered by any group of area studies scholars and have a grasp of the core theoretical materials for what can be multiple different disciplines. These might or might not already be available to support a disciplinary department, but often the emphasis can be different for area studies scholars. By default much research carried out in disciplinary departments is in fact defined by area, in that it reflects an Anglo-American experience or outlook without that outlook ever being overtly expressed. An area studies research programme might well challenge that approach and bring in other theoretical perspectives, requiring a different set of core materials.

By contrast with building a disciplinary collection, it cannot be assumed that general background and contextual material on the country or region being studied is widely available in other nearby libraries, or available at all. This means that the selection and acquisition of primary source material and material in a variety of formats are likely to be important. These might be published within the country, or but could equally come from a third country. Ephemera, government publications, pamphlets, reports from NGOs, charities or international organizations, newspapers, economic and business data, census reports, maps, publications produced by migrant communities in third countries, films and documentaries and other broadcast outputs, all have their place alongside print and

electronic books and periodicals – and websites, blogs and twitter feeds. They can be hard to identify, and often if they are not acquired quickly they are no longer available at all. With print publications the small print run and limited circulation item is a perennial problem, as is the item published and only available from a small or remote part of the country - although of course the definition of remote depends on where you are starting from. For many countries bibliographic control is poor or non-existent, and selection tools limited in usefulness. It can be particularly hard to find out about items published outside big cities, or by small scholarly publishers. Print runs can be very small, and once they go out of print items can be permanently unobtainable. ISBNs might not be widely used. This can make the task of selecting material very demanding and time consuming, even if the potential user base is small. Obviously the Internet has helped, both as a source of information about the publishing industry across the world, and because more of this material is available electronically, but identifying relevant content needs skill and a substantial knowledge of each country and its publishing industry. For very large libraries an assessment has to be made about the percentage of a country's book production (looking just at books) that should be collected. The easiest answer is to say it should be everything, duplicating the role of a national library, or everything intended for an academic audience, but that is beyond the budget and the scope of most academic libraries and harder choices have to be made. Careful defining and refining of approval plans with specialist suppliers is one solution used by many libraries, although it has its critics.

Then there is the question of language. Some material might be available in English but that is unlikely to represent the full publishing output of most countries, especially those which do not have English as an official language. Some countries have several official languages, and they might not be at all similar or even in the same script. For a real understanding of the functioning of a country it can be necessary to work in many more languages; in Africa or Asia there can be hundreds of languages in active use in a single country, and the relevant specialist librarian might be responsible for the whole of Africa or Asia, or a very large part of it. Minority languages can be very important for anyone working on the sociology, anthropology or politics of a region or country, and without material in minority languages the collection can be said to be seriously unrepresentative. From a historical perspective there might also be need for publications in the languages of imperial powers, such as French or Spanish or Portuguese or Dutch, which are probably the responsibility of the librarian responsible for that country, if there is one, and a decision will have to be made about whether their remit also extends to material about and from their former colonies.

It is of course not realistic to expect any individual to have mastery of all the potential languages that might be required, so a strategy will have to be developed to ensure that important material is not missed because of a lack of linguistic skills. This might mean particularly close collaboration with the researchers concerned, and with other libraries collecting on the same region, where sharing of linguistic skills can be a useful and practical solution, although not without its disadvantages. Inevitably the interests of the local research community combined with the linguistics skills of the library staff will create a collection with a particular linguistic profile and subject range, which might not be obvious to outsiders or when comparing different collections on the same country or region nationally or internationally. No research community or related collection will cover all aspects of any country in all relevant languages.

## **Budgets and finance**

Setting and managing a budget for an area studies collection can also test the patience of all concerned. As with the purchase of any overseas material, fluctuating exchange rates and their associated bank charges are a factor, but the more volatile the country or region, and the more likely to be the subject of current research, the more likely it is that other factors will come into play which will make accurate budgeting more difficult. For print material there is often a very significant time lag between ordering and receipt. Vendors working in difficult

circumstances might batch material and send it only once or twice a year when they have enough to make it worthwhile for them, making it hard to meet targets set by finance departments working within institutional financial years. Often items will not be supplied at all, and can sit on ordering systems for years unless backlogs of orders are actively managed. Postage costs can be high, and from time to time customs charges can also be applied unpredictably, leading to items being held up until the charges are met. The basic cost of the item is only one factor in the price that is eventually paid, and that too can be subject to external factors. Often libraries become used to a low cover price for publications from overseas, but political and economic upheaval can suddenly produce runaway inflation rates, eventually driving local publishers and suppliers out of business. The publishing industry can also change radically following political change. Following the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union libraries had to move from a centralised controlled publishing industry with low cost books to the creation of market-based publishing, with, eventually, a much greater variety of content and range of costs. In the short term, rapid inflation in all areas of the post-Soviet economy pushed up the price of books alarmingly.

Although print books continue to dominate the acquisitions process for area studies, at least for the time being, they have been supplemented in recent years by substantial new digital resources, opening up new possibilities for researchers, but at a very high price. Large western publishers have seized the opportunity to digitise and publish backfiles of overseas journals, newspapers and sets of official archives that have never before been accessible. Access to these resources quickly becomes essential for those carrying out serious research, but it can be hard to find the funds to pay for a new digital archive costing thousands or even tens of thousands of pounds, when there is no reduction in print spending to help offset the cost, and the potential user base is small. For some titles national negotiation has helped, but for others where there might be only one or two institutions likely to subscribe, this is not an option. An awareness of potential usage by researchers across all departments of a university can help make the case, although that they can be difficult to identify in a large university and hard to contact if existing liaison routes are not already in place. A university might have large numbers of students from a particular country, but they might only have relatively small research programmes on that country. This is where one question of selection policy comes into play: how far does any university library buy expensive electronic resources in foreign languages likely to be of interest to overseas staff and students because of their country of origin rather than their academic interests, benefiting a small and specialist community of researchers at the same time?

Where formulae are used to set budgets all the above factors make area studies a rather inconvenient exception and reinforce the need for the area librarian to be an active and effective advocate. Periodically in the UK and the US there is government recognition of the need to fund libraries building collections from particular parts of the world. In the US Title VI funding for National Resource Centers has provided an element for library cost, although this has decreased over the years. In the UK there have been periodic initiatives to fund strategically important subjects, but they rarely provide specifically for purchase costs. Instead UK libraries with major research collections have received some funding as recognition of their role in supporting research beyond their institution. Inevitably this is extremely vulnerable to changes in the political and economic mood, and therefore cannot be relied on for long. At one time it recognised many important research collections in the UK, but now supports only very few.

### **“Just-in-case” versus “just-in time”**

Once a library has decided what to collect and in which languages, and set a budget, the next problem is the acquisition process. In many academic libraries “just in case” acquisition of books is being overtaken by “just in time”, where patron-driven or evidence-based acquisition of e-books is providing a quick and cost-effective model to meet the needs of

teachers and researchers in many disciplines, and satisfying those concerned with space management that books are not left for years taking up expensive shelf space when nobody is seen to need them. There are few voices raised now against this move to “just-in-time” acquisition of publications on demand. It is only those libraries that have a broader remit to support research over the long term that might see costs as well as benefits. One professor of librarianship has queried the long-term impact of this approach on the quality of research library collections:

“Good libraries that build collections based upon patron-driven acquisitions will be able to provide researchers with what they want. Great libraries will be able to provide researchers with useful resources that they didn’t know they needed.” (Holley, 2012)

Most university libraries might wish to meet that standard but will find it hard to do so within budgetary constraints, especially as student numbers continue to rise. The exception will be those that aim to collect foreign publications on any scale, who invariably find that the “just in case” approach is the only one that works, meaning that more traditional acquisitions methods tend to be continued, often against the direction of progress within the Library. Those traditional methods might well be a matter of concern to many acquisitions departments, with a tendency to be diverse, time consuming, expensive, unusual, and risky, and hence hard to fit into institutional processes aimed at efficiency and value for money. Sometimes they have needed government support to function at all, making them even more vulnerable to the political mood of the day. Sometimes that government support has involved other obligations which have added to the long term costs of acquiring overseas publications.

### **National initiatives**

Examples of earlier government sponsored initiatives from the United States include the use of designated overseas agents to distribute publications to specified libraries under the Farmington Plan, immediately after the Second World War; and the purchase of publications for US libraries under the LC Public Law 480 Program, set up in 1962 as a consequence of the Public Law 480 Act of 1954. This act allowed for the free distribution or heavily subsidised sale of surplus agricultural production by the US government to countries in need of such assistance. In many cases any income generated by the sale could not be legally converted to US dollars and so was of limited use. The LC PL-480 program was established to take advantage of this opportunity, putting in place mechanisms to spend this money locally to buy books and serials for US libraries and shipping them back to the US, where they would form part of the national research collection. At its peak in the 1960s it operated in a range of countries, including India, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the former Yugoslavia. The publications were selected by local agents, supported by US librarians, and distributed to those libraries designated by the relevant sub-committees of the Farmington Plan, which was the major collaborative collection management scheme of its day. The scheme had the advantage of being cost-free initially for the US libraries that benefited, although they were later asked to contribute towards its costs, and it carried obligations to catalogue and make available the publications acquired under the scheme. These obligations could prove burdensome and were not always honoured, but demonstrate that the costs of acquiring foreign publications to an institution are usually more than the cover price, and can manifest themselves in multiple ways.

A related development in the US designed for managing foreign acquisitions was the establishment of the Library of Congress Overseas Offices. The first were set up in 1962 to help administer the PL-480 Program, although they have since other funds made available to them. Of the nine that operated at one time six remain in existence, purchasing material in multiple formats for the Library of Congress and a hundred other partner libraries. As the

Director of the Rio de Janeiro Office points out, they are designed to provide a service from those countries where acquisitions would otherwise be difficult:

Stretching across the globe from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Nairobi, Kenya; Cairo; Egypt; Islamabad, Pakistan, New Delhi, India to Jakarta, Indonesia, globe, at least one of the six offices is open for business any given hour. Combined, these offices cover 83 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America and collect materials in about 150 languages and 25 different scripts. You will note that offices are not located in Europe or the smaller Latin American countries. That is because there are commercial book dealers in those countries who are able to meet the collecting needs of the Library of Congress.(Howard-Reguindin, 2004)

Alongside acquisitions the LC overseas offices also have important roles in cataloguing, preservation and microfilming.

### **Procurement and vendors**

National initiatives such as these designed to deal with problematic overseas acquisitions have not been available to UK libraries in the same way. Throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century exchanges, personal visits and personal contacts were the primary methods for most libraries for acquiring material from many countries, and although this is no longer true for much of Europe they remain an essential part of the process for many other parts of the world. The large vendors that dominate the market for Anglo-American publications cannot provide an equivalent service, or any service at all, for this more challenging material, and usually any procurement arrangements will exclude acquisitions of this kind. When a procurement exercise is undertaken for vendors it is always worth asking whether they can provide an equally satisfactory service for publications from specific "difficult" countries of particular interest to the library. Often even the largest international companies are limited in their geographical scope and will have no experience of dealing with the publishing industries in some countries. Publications from these countries can then be excluded from the contract, allowing the library to use reliable and experienced specialist vendors for overseas publications.

Finding a reliable vendor, or ideally more than one, can be a difficult task, and often a lack of competition makes this rather a high risk process, although it might not seem so at the time. Usually there are very few potential vendors capable of meeting a library's needs for research publications from particular countries. They can also be very small operations, based on a few enthusiastic and committed people driven by a wish to make the published output of their country better known, alongside their commercial motives. While this has to be a good thing it can lead to some unusual problems, of which the one that is rarely discussed is that of too close a working relationship between librarian and vendor. Where they are seen to be working together in common cause to increase understanding of a misrepresented and little understood country, or of a minority within that country, it can be harder to maintain a hard-nosed commercial relationship and ensure good value for money for the institution. A single vendor, wherever based, is also a potential risk. In 1991 many UK libraries buying Russian books from a single supplier in Paris were caught out when that supplier went out of business, only to be in the same position again when the same thing happened in 1997 to the only UK based supplier, who had taken over the customers from the French business. Almost every library in the UK that needed Russian books was dependent on that single vendor, and therefore the supply across the country stopped when that vendor stopped operating. The other problem with a single vendor is that the range of material available is limited to that which is handled by that vendor, and is the same for every library. Where there are gaps they cannot be filled and they might go unnoticed until someone steps back and views the national collection as a coherent whole, which might be much later when it will no longer be possible to fill those gaps retrospectively. In subjects where only a small subset of the nation's libraries collect at all, cooperation and

collaboration is the only way to resolve numerous problems, from identifying good vendors to dealing with specialist enquiries. If every library is buying from the same source and using the same information, the scope for mutual support that expands the expertise available is much more limited, and the services and collections available to the researcher equally limited. It is understandable, especially where there is little staff time available, if a library goes for the easy options in selecting vendors and means of supply, but if every library does this the breadth of material available to researchers will be damaged.

For many years exchanges were the primary way of acquiring overseas publications from many countries. Although they have declined they can still be suggested as a part of an institutional agreement with an overseas organisation, but are normally disadvantageous wherever commercial alternatives exist. Exchanges as a means of acquisition were described as far back as 2002 by a Slavonic librarian in the UK as "inefficient, ineffective, and consume staff time and resources that can be better applied elsewhere" (Hogg, 2002) in an article looking at acquisitions methods in UK and US libraries for Slavonic and East European material. Three years later the results of a survey of US Slavic librarians were published, which looked at the methods used to acquire publications from the region. The risk of a growing reliance on approval plans was highlighted as it was likely to lead to "a limited and homogenous collection" (Dali & Dilevko, 2005). Instead the survey shows a wide range of acquisition methods in use in some libraries alongside approval plans, including the use of multiple local vendors, direct purchase from small research institutes outside the big cities, attendance at book fairs, purchase through online bookstores, and personal trips, either by librarians themselves or by academic staff who are trusted to buy on behalf of the Library. Many of these methods meant that the payment had to be made in an unorthodox way. Online suppliers might need to be paid by credit card, payments might need to be wired abroad, or individuals have to pay from their own pocket and be reimbursed when they return, often against the most minimal of receipts. The difficulties around implementing a highly selective approval plan for Japanese publications in the context of a limited budget, an institutional focus on just-in-time purchasing, increasing time constraints, and vendors reluctant to accept returns and unused to approval plans, are described in a 2008 article by the Japanese Studies Librarian at the University of Arizona. In many subject areas the number of potential titles to be supplied proved too large and too expensive. The solution implemented in the end was a compromise whereby the librarian selected from a list supplied by a single Japanese vendor, and this proved the most efficient and cost-effective method (Kamada, 2004). A standard approval plan was simply too large for the needs of the Library. Balance between staff time spent and the quality of the collection can only be assessed by the success of library in supporting research within the institution, and there are no very precise ways of measuring that.

## **E-books**

It is easy to assume that the digital revolution in electronic publishing will have made the acquisition of overseas material easier, and to some extent of course this is true, although it sets its own challenges in defining what should and should not be collected. The answer seems not yet to be the e-book. The complications of providing access to academic e-books from Anglo-American publishers are well known, with complex payment models and limited access due to digital rights management (DRM). Needless to say, the state of e-book publishing worldwide is enormously variable. A snapshot of the situation compiled by members of the Global and Area Studies Department at the Perkins Library of Duke University gives details of the state of the e-book publishing industry worldwide. The picture varies from almost no e-book publishing in India or Pakistan, with no national statistics available, to Japan which is the second largest market for e-books in the world. The reasons given for lack of take up in India and Pakistan include the high price of e-readers and tablets, although cheaper local models are starting to appear on the market. Even once those become available the widespread availability of pirated texts online free of charge is holding



back the legal market in e-books ("Global ebook snapshot," 2012). Not only is this detailed information by country and region interesting and useful, but so is the fact that it has been compiled and published by the specialist area studies librarians at Duke. It is hard to imagine anyone else having the expertise.

### **Barriers to acquisition**

Barriers to successful acquisition include problems of unpredictable costs, the need for at least some knowledge of multiple languages; and a likely mismatch between the effort needed to build a useful collection and the number of scholars likely to use it at any one time. "Just in time" acquisition is not yet a model that can meet all needs. The process of identifying reliable vendors for a particular country or region and having a reasonable ability to forecast expenditure when faced with price and currency fluctuations can be difficult. Making the case for comparatively high levels of expenditure for minority interests can be challenging, especially when faced with formulae based on student numbers.

The issues hindering successful acquisition from abroad have been well known for many years. After the Second World War it was reported by those involved in setting up the Farmington Plan in the US that "one-third of the world's books were not in the United States" (Wagner, 2002). Problems with paying overseas suppliers during the war and interruptions to supply had worsened an already poor situation. Despite substantial efforts over the years since to address the deficiencies, including the Farmington Plan and the PL-480 program the situation continued to be unsatisfactory. In 1992 in the US a task force was set up the AAU in collaboration with ARL librarians and Directors of Area Studies Centres, alongside scholars and government representatives to consider the future in the light of a reduction nationally in foreign language acquisition caused by unfavourable exchange rates, funding cuts, inflation and political instability abroad. Their recommendations set a model for a collaborative approach to the problem. Three demonstration projects were funded: on the acquisition of Latin American materials, German language material and Japanese language scientific and technical resources. The purpose was to "test the barriers to distributed access and evaluate their impact on faculty" (Jakubs, 2000). These led in 1997 to the establishment by the ARL of the Global Resources Program with Mellon funding which set up a number of collaborative projects concerned with making collections accessible through digital technology. National initiatives such as this have made a substantial difference in certain areas, but the basic problems of overseas acquisitions remain.

A 2007 book on "Building Area Studies Collections" is one of very few recent publications to bring together descriptions of the methods used and the challenges experienced by librarians collecting from different parts of the world. To give just a few examples, the chapter on the Middle East describes the need to buy from North Africa, Iran, Turkey and Israel as well as the core Arab countries. There are multiple local languages, some from very different traditions, and French and English are both used in material from the colonial periods. There is little bibliographic control, few ISBNs, and poor national bibliographies, and the rate of publication is increasing. Every country has its own vendors and exchanges are still used to some extent. Aside from the politics, economics and societies of each country there are developing areas of research interest to buy on, such as Iranian cinema (Hirsch, 2007).

The African studies curator at Northwestern University describes the purchase of African monographs as "prohibitively challenging", citing difficulties in communication, including such apparently simple processes as verifying the address of a publisher. He also highlights the ethical issues which need to be borne in mind while dealing with African publishers and suppliers, noting the concerns that "comprehensive collections of African studies materials exist in the United States, but not in Africa" (Easterbrook, 2007). The same point is made in relation to South East Asia, by Judith Henchy. She highlights the following problems for librarians accessing information in the region:

Local government policy, poor distribution, lack of timely national bibliographies, and expert controls. Censorship and government control are pervasive in book publishing, the newspaper industry, radio, and television. Government secrecy laws restrict the circulation of materials considered sensitive. Strict postal and export regulations often constrain the international dissemination of cultural materials (Henchy, 2007)

The chapter on Latin America shows an improving picture, with a more established publishing and distribution industry, but with information flow still hindered by poor bibliographic control and particular difficulties obtaining ephemera and grey literature, which may not be commercially available. To build a collection on Latin America still requires “creativity, patience, and serendipity” (Shirey, 2007).

Aside from the numerous problems identified above there can also be particular problems acquiring special formats. A 2009 article by two librarians at Minnesota State University describes their project to create a sub-Saharan African film collection, largely to meet the needs of their growing number of students of African heritage (Schomberg & Bergman, 2009). They focus on documentaries and feature films made in four regions of Africa: Nigeria, South Africa, West Africa and East Africa, rather than on films about Africa made abroad. They are able to recommend a number of key films for each area, but that list is restricted by the fact that many African films are not distributed outside Africa and cannot be acquired by libraries overseas. Other can only be purchased through a limited number of French distributors.

Even the most developed countries with the strongest economies and high standards of bibliographic control can cause difficulties. Diane Perushek, writing on East Asia, describes the custom in Japan of producing enormous multi-volume sets with hundreds of volumes, at very high cost. Chinese publications are cheap in China, but sold at greatly inflated prices to overseas customers. Special funding has been needed, with some financial assistance made available from National Resource Center grants and from the Korean Foundation. Particular types of publication are hard to obtain. Government publications are produced for cadres only, and not made available for sale (Perushek, 2007). It is easy to imagine that collecting from Western Europe would be straightforward and in many ways of course it is, although it is usually as expensive as collecting from the UK or the US. Bibliographic control is good and standard commercial publishing and purchasing practices apply. The language factor however remains a problem. James Spohrer points out that although French, German, Spanish and Italian are widely known and studied, this is not the case when it comes to Dutch, Finnish, or the Scandinavian languages, all of which are very little studied, making selection and acquisition more difficult for those less studied countries. (Spohrer, 2007).

All the librarians working in the most “difficult” areas make a point of stressing the value of the Library of Congress Overseas Offices and of the various collaborative networks in the United States. With all the complexities surrounding the acquisition process, sharing knowledge through national and international professional networks is very helpful, especially for the specialist in a smaller library. Sharing mechanisms for acquisitions is an inevitable solution but leads to its own problems, particularly in creating more homogenous collections. Who is identifying gaps nationally in coverage of the rest of the world, or are they left until it suddenly becomes strategically important to understand a particular country? How far can electronic publishing provide an answer, and how far can we make sure that any answer allows information to be as open as possible and as available to the people who created it as it to those of us elsewhere who study it?

### **Questions of ethics**

Ethical issues underlie many of the more difficult acquisition decisions that an area specialist librarian will make, although they are little discussed. The potential conflict between the

institution's financial interests and the need to retain good relations with specialist vendors has already been mentioned. Many specialist librarians have been slow to stop exchanges with libraries abroad, once commercial alternatives have become practical. They are aware that the overseas library might have very little funding and rely on exchange partners to be able to add to its collection at all. Without Anglo-American titles arriving on exchange the overseas academic community will be cut off entirely from Western scholarship. Sometimes the ethical issues merge into questions of law. Is it acceptable to acquire a photocopy or digitised copy of an item if its copyright status is unclear, even if that item is essential to a researcher and not otherwise available at all outside its country of origin, where the law might be quite different? Most research libraries with an interest in the region would leap at the chance to acquire dissident writings from North Korea or other authoritarian regimes even though such writings would be illegal there, but where is the line drawn? Some official reports could well be perceived as unreasonably restricted in their country of origin due to censorship, and the rise of the web as a publishing medium brings these questions to the fore. Even where censorship is not an issue the attitude to copyright differs enormously from country to country, and e-book collections published overseas might be readily available and used by academic staff, but not conform to UK or US law. At times of international crisis sanctions can be imposed which prohibit the transfer of books or the carrying out of business with certain countries. In recent years that has been true of Iraq and Cuba. In those circumstances it might still be possible to buy publications through suppliers operating in third countries or acquire them through other informal means. Should a librarian take advantage of whatever method is available, knowing that any gap in the collection might never be filled if they do not?

Broader ethical issues have also been raised in relation to buying publications from overseas, particularly when it is the rich north stocking its libraries from the poorer south. The problem has been discussed by an academic and a librarian with extensive experience of working in Africa. They report hearing the accusation of "bibliographic imperialism" levelled at the LC office in Nairobi. (J. J. Britz & Lor, 2003). Where local communities have no access to academic libraries the activities of vendors and librarians buying up scholarly material so that rich westerners can access it can be seen as problematic and a source of justified resentment if local libraries cannot afford to buy the same titles. This problem becomes even worse when it comes to archives. Most librarians working with disciplinary collections are not much involved in the acquisition of archives by their libraries, but if regional or linguistic knowledge is involved an area specialist librarian will probably be at least consulted if not closely involved in the entire process. Issues of cultural property which are outside the mainstream for librarians will come into play and have to be handled with the greatest sensitivity. The African Studies Librarian at Indiana University has described her role in acquiring the H.K. Banda archive of personal papers and an archive of linguistic field notes on the Nuer language collected by a former missionary to South Sudan (Frank-Wilson, 2010). She describes the efforts she put in to maintain good relations with the donors, to select the content both for initial acquisition and then within that selection, for digitisation, and to create a digital resource. While recognising potential problems with a US library owning this material she sees digitisation as a partial solution. It can be only partial, not only because only a subset of the available content can be digitised, but because so much of the world does not have ready access to computers or the Internet, or even electricity, and so is still very much the wrong side of the digital divide. Other projects described later in this book have addressed this problem of ownership by digitising the content while leaving it in situ, or using digitisation to bring together collections that are geographically scattered. In those instances problems of acquisition no longer apply in the same way.

The practice of "Western" libraries, including Japanese as well as European and American, buying up (the phrase is significant, not just to buy but to remove) intellectual resources in the South has been challenged numerous times on ethical grounds. One author draws a direct comparison with the exploitation of mineral resources by large Western companies,

and advocates better south-south collaboration around information flow (Hongladarom, 2007). The idea that these materials can be protected by removing them and storing them in better conditions in western libraries is increasingly being challenged. Striking recent examples such as the extraordinary efforts of local librarians in Mali to protect ancient manuscripts from destruction during the occupation of Timbuktu show that the will and the commitment are available everywhere, even if the funding and the infrastructure are more limited. In Mali 400,000 manuscripts were moved by car and boat, to protect them from islamist rebels, and then hidden in cellars. In 2003 some were lent to the Library of Congress for an exhibition.

Care in these matters is not just a matter of morality but has increasingly become a matter of formal policy backed up by law. The British Library has an "Ethical Future Acquisitions Policy", approved in 2006, which covers issue of due diligence in establishing ownership and preventing the inadvertent acquisition of looted or otherwise illegally obtained materials (British Library, n.d.-a). The policy also makes specific reference to the BL's potential role as a safe haven but only in exceptional and rare circumstances with the status of the material to be kept under review. In the UK the Department of Culture Media and Sport created guidelines for libraries and museums, based on the 1970 UNESCO guidelines (UNESCO, 1970) to help them avoid looted or illegally exported material, and set in place procedures for due diligence to be carried out. (UK Department of Culture, 2005). They apply specifically to cultural property originating from outside the UK and the focus is on museum artefacts, but the guidance is as useful for collections of rare books, archives and manuscripts from abroad.

## 4. Area Studies Collections 2: Collection Management

### **Abstract:**

This chapter looks at the management of area studies collections in the context of the changing role of research libraries. The best area studies collections are likely to be unique and distinctive, and add to the profile of their institution. Where are they located, and what methods can be used to assess their quality? The role of national libraries in the UK and US and elsewhere is considered. The history of collaborative collection management for area studies at national level is outlined, and examples given of regional and local initiatives.

**Keywords:** collection assessment, collection mapping, national libraries, collaborative collection management, Farmington Plan, Mapping Asia, CoFoR, Pacslav, C2UL.

The big issues in collection management around storage, disposal and collaboration are almost entirely to do with managing the transition to electronic from print. How much are print collections still needed? Can collaboration at a national level save precious space and protect a residual national print collection while still enabling researchers to access all the material they need? In many disciplines the changes have been radical, particularly at research level, and almost all material is accessed electronically. Library print collections in many universities are more and more dedicated to student course books, where the move to e-books is being slower, more complicated and more expensive, and researchers often do not visit the physical library. The resources they need are available at their desk, whether that desk is in their office on campus or at home, and as a consequence they feel, with some justification, that the Library space is no longer designed with their needs in mind. Many library spaces have been transformed to provide new facilities for the ever growing student populations, with the physical collections often taking second place to new types of collaborative study space. The possibilities have been exciting, although there is always a tension between those who still value the print collections and the traditional hallowed quiet of a research library, and those who believe that this model belongs to the past. In the best cases that tension can be a productive one, as most academic libraries do their utmost to meet the needs of all their users, whether a first year undergraduate doing group work and needing access to recommended books and journal articles for their course, or a senior professor working with a specialist research collection.

In such a context questions are being asked about the definition and purpose of a research library, when this would traditionally have been defined entirely by the size and quality of its collections. In the UK the main organisation for research libraries, RLUK, has captured the current challenges in their new strategy for 2014-17:

We are living in a complex environment in which information is delivered in both physical and digital formats. Traditional materials co-exist and interrelate with virtual resources. As researchers and students adopt new methods, their expectations of libraries are changing. New formats bring new challenges around collecting, ownership, usage and lending rights, and preservation. The increasing ubiquity of electronic versions raises questions about the need for extensive, duplicate print collections. Users expect born-physical collections spanning millennia to have the same functionality as born-digital materials (and vice versa) as libraries seek to integrate their digital collections with a rationalised physical estate to serve researchers and students more effectively (RLUK, 2014).

As background to their strategy RLUK carried out two distinct strands of consultation. One was entitled "Redefining the Research Library model" and the work there has focused on precisely this question of how a modern academic library best supports research. Interestingly for a discussion on area studies, there was a separate strand on "promoting unique and distinctive collections". This reflects a growing trend in discussions around research support in academic libraries to focus attention when thinking about collections on

the special and the rare, and to accept and benefit from the fact that much standard material is available online and that access to it might be mediated by the Library, but that space no longer needs to be given over to it on the shelves.

Within this context there is a danger that those who work with area studies collections can be seen as conservative and resistant to change, as they strive to protect their print collections from being swept up in a whirlwind. In fact it is precisely these collections that often meet the criteria for being unique and distinctive within the institution, or even nationally. It just needs the staff concerned at all levels of decision making to think beyond the traditional definition of a special collection to include material that is not necessarily old, costly, or beautifully bound, but is none the less rare and important. As tools are gradually being developed to make the process of collection assessment easier, it should become more likely that the value of these collections can be recognised, particularly if they are not easily identified physically as a single collection.

### **Collection Assessment: judging the quality of an area studies collection**

An objective evaluation of any collection can be difficult to obtain, but for an area studies collection there can be particular problems in collection assessment. At the most basic level an assessment of the financial value of the collection is often meaningless, and librarians can produce only the most rough approximation when asked to do so for insurance purposes. Often the cover price of the books might be very low, depending on their country of origin, but it is very likely that they are irreplaceable and could not be purchased again, even on the second hand market. Statistics about usage might not be more helpful, as it is common for the number of researchers working on any particular area or country to be relatively small in relation to the size of the collection needed to support their work. Within a university there is often an element of subsidy to support smaller more specialist areas of work that cannot depend on student fee income and research grants alone, and the library as part of the institution should be aware of how that principle should affect their priorities too. Loan statistics are often used to make decisions about relegation and disposal, but of course only ever give a partial picture of the use of any collection. A large part of any good area studies collection will often be given over to reference material which will not be available for loan. If numerical data is less useful for judging usage there are other, less apparently scientific, ways of assessing the value of your collection. What kind of external users does the collection attract? How often is it acknowledged in publications? A quick search of Google scholar can be very revealing in assessing the reach of your collection and how well the staff that support it are appreciated by the broader academic community.

There is another even less measurable factor which those who manage area collections cannot help but be aware of, and that is the strength of feeling there can be in relation to these collections. Many area studies collections were developed in the twentieth century in response to life-changing events that occurred within the lifetime and the personal experience of many of those who use them. Decisions about their future are unlikely to pass unnoticed and unchallenged not only by researchers, but by members of the public and special interest groups. Whatever the reason, these collections tend to be highly valued by their users. Recent examples of such decisions that have caused a serious degree of orchestrated opposition from a variety of quarters include the planned replacement of the Library of Congress European Reading Room with exhibition space, and the closure of the Slavic and Baltic Division and the Asian and Middle Eastern Division of the New York Public Library. The Slavic Division of NYPL in particular was world renowned, and although the collections still exist they were largely moved to offsite storage. This combined with the loss of the dedicated space and staff caused an outcry. As a result the Library has taken steps to provide a dedicated member of staff and has made a public commitment to further development of the collections. In these circumstances there is always a question of trust involved, and the continued visibility of a collection that attracts scholars from across the world helps to reassure them that it is still being well managed. As the head of the Library of

Congress European Division wrote in 1997, shortly after three new reading rooms opened, for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and Asia: "These spacious and researcher-friendly rooms provide improved access to the Library's vast foreign language collections, and are themselves a testament to the Library's ongoing commitment to area studies and its foreign language collections" (Van Oudenaren, 1997). The closure of such reading rooms, even if for apparently justifiable professional reasons, cannot help but send the opposite message.

Assessing the strength or otherwise of any collection has always been difficult, laborious and inaccurate. Little hard evidence exists in the way of data, and terms such as strength are by their nature usually a matter of opinion rather than fact. The quality of a collection, however judged, can also change over time. One method of assessing quality is to compare the number of books to be found in library catalogues in a defined subject area with the number of those published. In 1984 and then again in 2004 this kind of data was collected from UK libraries with Arabic collections. As far as possible comparable sources such as national bibliographies were used to assess the level of publishing in specified subjects in each of the countries chosen, and a time lag allowed to account for cataloguing backlogs. This laborious process resulted in statistical information for the main Arabic libraries in the UK, showing not only which collections were strongest but how that had changed over the intervening twenty years. Three libraries: SOAS, Oxford, and the British Library, dominated both tables, but there had been a considerable shift in the smaller collections, mainly as a result of shifts in teaching and research in individual universities. The survey also shows, alarmingly, that many titles are held only in one copy in the UK, demonstrating the vulnerable nature of the national collection in this area (Auchterlonie, 2005).

Fortunately the time consuming processes described above for the assessment of Arabic collections are beginning to be replaced by more sophisticated methods, which have the potential to identify collections that are not necessarily maintained as separate entities. The tools that are currently being developed to allow libraries in the UK to measure how rare their holdings are on COPAC are of enormous potential in providing hard statistical evidence of the rarity of a library's holdings on any subject, whether or not is represented in a physical collection. In due course this type of statistical analysis should allow libraries to make much better informed decisions about their collections, based on hard data about their place in the national research collection.

Anecdotally, specialist library staff and researchers know very well which collections are most likely to be useful to them and are worth travelling to, and not all the reasons are to do with the size of the collection. Issues of location and convenience come into play, alongside the personal service they will get in a library with expert staff where they are known. In London it is the concentration of specialist collections within a small area that makes it a magnet for researchers in all disciplines, but for area studies in particular there is a unique combination of specialist libraries backed up by the British Library that means that all serious researchers from the UK and many from abroad pass through at one time or another. Not all those specialist libraries are in universities, and collections in research institutes, government departments, think tanks, and émigré organisations have always formed a vital part of the national collection relating to the rest of the world. In the UK this has been recognised in recent years by the addition of some of these smaller, less well known collections to COPAC as part of a deliberate strategy to expand the range of research material that is visible to the research community.

The nature of area studies can make it very difficult for some libraries, and therefore some researchers, to have a clear idea of the size and importance of their collection on any particular country or region. Where the collection is housed in a specialist area studies library, as is the case with a few institutions, this is not a problem, but where it is part of a large collection held and managed as one it can disappear from sight. It has often been the difficulties of fit into a larger collection that has led to the creation and continuing existence of dedicated specialist area studies libraries, either within larger institutional structures or

outside them altogether. Within university libraries it is usually the combination of the classification scheme and shortcomings in cataloguing that cause the problem. The standard classification schemes will all scatter an area studies collection by discipline, rendering it almost invisible. That would not matter so much if the catalogue could always bring it together again, but in practice for the long established collections changing catalogue standards over the years have made this impossible. The effect of this can be seen most clearly in the British Library, where of course the collections are not available on the open shelves to browse. The description of each area or country collection on their website begins with a statement like this one, for Polish:

The exact size of the Polish holdings is not known, since, like other country/language holdings, they have no separate catalogue and are dispersed within the rest of the collections. There are approximately 21,400 titles in Polish in the current catalogue (which covers items acquired since 1975. (British Library, n.d.-b))

To the research community in Polish studies, not knowing the exact figure for the British Library's holdings is not very important, or not important at all, so long as researchers know that the collection exists and something about its content. But if the UK is to make serious strategic decisions about the management of print collections on Poland, or any other country, in the UK then it matters rather a lot that the precise holdings of the largest and most important collection in the country cannot be identified with any degree of accuracy. It also matters that it is the oldest and potentially most valuable material, however that value might be judged, which is the hardest to identify.

The British Library clearly puts a great deal of effort into describing its collections online, doing much to mitigate the effects on users of the lack of precise figures on collection size and extent. The visibility of its collections is a vital part of its public profile, allowing it to reach out to the research community and beyond. The role of library collections in enhancing the reputation of a university was highlighted in a 2011 report commissioned by the RIN and RLUK on the value of libraries for research and researchers.

The library's research collections can be a distinctive feature of an institution, boosting its 'brand'. The quality, nature and comprehensiveness of the library's collections can be a key selling point, a major draw for international students, and an influence on researchers when choosing whether to apply for or accept a post. (RIN & RLUK, 2011)

The report makes particular reference in this context to "historical, rare and unique research resources built up over the lifetime of the institution by purchase, gift or bequest"; a precise description of most area studies collections. To some extent the impact of such collections could potentially be measured in the UK by their appearance in environment statements collected and assessed as part of the Research Excellence Framework and its predecessors. That process has a direct effect on the amount of funding provided by government to UK universities, and therefore a clear understanding of the importance of a collection could not be more important in purely practical terms.

Understanding exactly what constitutes the research collection used by area studies researchers will always be difficult, because of the intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of the field. Although this is true of all interdisciplinary research, the growth of which has made collection boundaries more porous, libraries need to be careful to look out for overlaps between a carefully defined disciplinary collection, often under the management of a subject librarian, and a very much more diffuse collection on a country or region. One particular example from a UK university springs to mind. The geography collection was being reviewed, and some old travel guides to Paris from the 1920s were disposed of as of no further interest to the geography department. Unfortunately they were of enormous use to researchers working on the Russian emigration to Paris between the wars, where they



formed a record of émigré businesses and centres of cultural activity, but that group of researchers was not consulted. We do not always know what collections we have and how they might be used, and sometimes our internal management structures work against the unpredictable and evolving interests of research.

If a library does recognise that it has an area studies collection of value to the wider research community then that involves serious questions about the library's role in supporting research nationally and its contribution to the national collection, however defined. Is the library in a position to maintain the collection, continue adding to it, and allow access to it over the long term? If the existence of the research area depends on special funding (Title VI in the US, or equivalent strategic funding in the UK) then the long term maintenance of the collections will also need special pleading, both within the university and nationally, and that is always difficult, especially when financial times are hard. Collecting evidence on the content and usage of that collection will be an essential part of any case that has to be made for special treatment.

### **The national and international context, or, where are the collections?**

When considering collection management decisions about material published abroad, the context for decision making is significantly different from that for Anglo-American and much European material. It is not necessarily the case that a researcher can simply go to another library, or even abroad, to get access to the content he or she needs. For some area studies researchers who focus on contemporary economics, politics, or sociology, much is online, but for others, and to provide the foundation upon which even the most contemporary research is based, there is no escaping the continuing need for print collections in area studies, at least for the time being and for the foreseeable future. It has long been the case that no research library has been able to consider itself self-sufficient in terms of its research collections, and area studies researchers in search of print material are used to travelling to locate the particular items that they need. The number of libraries that are likely to be able to support them will be very significantly smaller than in any single academic discipline. At the time of writing the membership of Universities UK comprises 134 universities, university colleges and colleges of higher education. SCONUL, the body that represents all higher education libraries in the UK, plus national libraries and collections of national significance, has 175 members. The website Ukira (UK Information Resources on Asia), which was originally entitled Mapping Asia, records collections on Asia in 43 institutions. Of these 14 are outside the university sector, including public libraries and a cathedral library, and two separate parts of the British Library – their Manuscripts department as well as their Asian and African collections. The remaining 29 collections are based in only 21 universities, as Oxford and Cambridge have multiple entries in different libraries. By far the largest collections are in Oxford, Cambridge and London, with the others being mainly smaller and more specialised collections scattered throughout the UK. Most researchers in the UK attempting to study Asia or Africa in any depth will not have access to substantial research collections in their own university libraries. There might be some material, bought for different purposes and located in different parts of the collection, but it is unlikely to be easy to identify, form a coherent whole, and have staff support with the expertise needed to look after it.

An area studies collection to support research in one institution might also be very unlike one in a neighbouring university, because the subject profile or precise geographical scope might be very different. A research collection on Russia in one library might focus on the humanities, maybe including film, theatre, and music, and with very little on the social science side. Another might be entirely focused on politics, economics and current affairs. A Slavonic collection might focus on only one or two countries, with Russia by far the most likely to be covered. A researcher wanting to study Albania or Bulgaria is limited to a handful of relatively small collections, all in the south east of England. Many collections were created a hundred or more years ago through the work of a few enthusiasts and have gone on to

attract donations of important material and researchers to them. The African Studies collection at Northwestern University in the United States is an obvious example. Much depends on the research interests of the academic community and each collection will develop according to the changing interests of that community, but is unlikely to be enough on its own to support the needs of that community. New collections are very rarely created, although some have disappeared over the years when a small research group has been broken up or moved to another institution. The strong history of collaboration between the libraries involved, albeit usually at an informal level, is essential in allowing information to be shared and help provided from wherever the expertise and the relevant material is located.

For researchers in most disciplines in search of an elusive item, their natural next port of call will be their national library and this is also true of those in search of publications from abroad. In the UK and the US the national libraries have wonderful international collections, very widely used and depended upon by researchers from across the world, but even they cannot be comprehensive in their collections of overseas publications. Their first priority is always to their own national publications, and it is this role which is naturally most prominent on their websites. Its obligations under legal deposit require the British Library to hold a copy of every book published in the United Kingdom, (with a welcome recent move to encompass web archiving too). Their current Content Strategy, for the rather disconcertingly brief period from 2013-15, is arranged by academic discipline, and they state their belief that this is “the best way to be responsive to the research communities it serves”. Their policy on overseas publications and on support for area studies is hard to find, but does appear in their content strategy in a section on inter- and multi-disciplinary research needs, where this rather opaque statement appears: “Area studies – for example American Studies or European Studies – are cross disciplinary: we will develop and manage a matrix relationship between individual subjects and area studies.” (British Library, n.d.-c)

There is no further information in this document on their policy towards foreign acquisitions, although there is very helpful detail elsewhere on their website about the extraordinary strengths of their existing collections. A 2008 article by the British Library’s then head of international engagement quotes Panizzi on his original aspirations for the Library: “the best Russian library out of Russia, the best German out of Germany, the best Spanish out of Spain, and so with every language from Italian to Icelandic, from Polish to Portuguese” (Stephens, 2008). It is unclear how much this is still an active aspiration, but the strength and breadth of the current overseas collections is a credit to the work of the curators over the years.

It is equally difficult to establish the Library of Congress’s policy on overseas publications. It states clearly that its primary purpose is to support the work of the US Congress, but gives at its next priority an explicit and rather grand reference to broader aspirations: “Second, to acquire, organize, preserve, secure and sustain for the present and future use of Congress and the nation a comprehensive record of American history and creativity and a universal collection of human knowledge.” (Library of Congress, n.d.-a). It is necessary to dig very much deeper to find the specifics that might indicate any limits to the universal collection of human knowledge. Individual collection policy statements are available for a wide range of subjects, but to discover policy on collecting overseas publications it is necessary to read into each subject statement looking for any indication of an international focus. There are only four that explicitly relate to the rest of the world: for government publications (foreign), newspapers (foreign), international organizations, and developing countries. The last is interesting, not only for the attempts to define what is a developing country and its apparent acceptance that there is no agreed definition, but for the final phrase, which reminds us that it is always the strategic interest of the nation that governs how much support there is for the study of the rest of the world:

This Collection Policy Statement is based on the third of the Library’s three “canons of Selection”: “the Library should possess in some useful form, the records of other

societies, past and present, and should accumulate, in original or in copy, full and representative collections of the written records of those societies and peoples whose experience is of most immediate concern to the people of the United States. (Library of Congress, n.d.-b)

This collecting policy goes on to set specific selection criteria for different categories of publication from developing countries, ranging from ephemera to government publications. It does not make clear how the phrase “immediate concern” should be interpreted.

It is quite clear that the ability of even the very largest national libraries to collect publications from outside their own country will depend on available funds and decisions about priorities that will change over the years, and this must have an impact on any individual academic library’s decisions relating to long term retention of its overseas publications. There are always individual researchers working away in relative isolation on countries which appear to be of no strategic importance, until some cataclysmic event hurls them into the limelight and they suddenly feature on every news broadcast. At the time of writing the case of Ukraine is an obvious one.

So should researchers just be prepared to travel abroad to use resources in the country that published them? In some cases this is quite possible and has become easier in recent years. The iron curtain is no longer a barrier and many libraries and archives in what was Communist Europe have welcomed researchers over recent years. The rise of digitization and born-digital content could even make travel to certain countries to access their publications unnecessary in the foreseeable future. Many of the national libraries in smaller European countries, particularly in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries, are able to be comprehensive in their collections on their own countries in print and have very extensive digitisation programmes to make their nation’s publications truly accessible worldwide. In 2011 the Director of the National Library of the Netherlands set out their strategy clearly:

To offer everyone everywhere digital access to everything published in and about the Netherlands. This implies that all Dutch books, newspapers and periodicals from 1470 will eventually be digitized. Our aim for the next 10 years is to digitize about 50% of the collection. (Savenije, 2011)

Of course, once you go beyond a small group of privileged countries, access to research materials becomes very significantly more difficult, for a multitude of reasons. Even if the content is available in the country in question, travel for research purposes might be prohibitively expensive, or simply impossible for political reasons. North Korea is unlikely at present to open its doors to a western academic wanting to study its political decision making processes. In other cases individual academics can find themselves refused visas to travel to the country they are working on, as a result of something they have written which is critical of the country’s regime. Occasionally in the past academics working on communist regimes have been subject to witch-hunts at home and their work hindered for political reasons. Bans on travel, for whatever reason, can apply for decades, leaving the researchers concerned dependent on collections held outside their country of interest. This is not always such a significant loss, as in many cases the range of material held abroad is much wider and more representative than is available in some national and academic libraries overseas. This can be because library infrastructure is undeveloped and national libraries relatively new and under-resourced. Publications from the colonial past of many countries will have been actively collected by the colonial powers and held in their national libraries, but not be widely available locally. In some cases where national libraries have been well established they have not been able to fulfil their role properly due to political pressure. In 2011 Saad B. Eskander, recently appointed Director of the Iraq National Library and Archive, described the role of that library between 1997 and 2003 in these words:

By firmly restricting access to information, by taking part in creating false national historical memory, by participating in the process of imposing cultural uniformity, by ignoring the written cultural heritage of ethnic and religious minorities and by refusing to keep a record of all the cultural and academic achievements of Iraqi intelligentsia, INLA became virtually an integral part of the former regime's oppressive machine (Eskander, 2011)

He goes on to call for the return to the Library of material held in the United States. His figures for losses from the Iraqi collections in the invasion of 2003 are striking: "INLA lost 60% of its archival collections, 25% of its book collections, 95% of its photographic collections, and 90% of its map collections".

There are many other reasons why collections across the world have been lost. Natural disaster and deliberate destruction have both taken their toll. In 1996 Unesco published a list of libraries and archives that had been destroyed in the twentieth century. The destruction was caused by a variety of means, including natural disasters such as fire, flood and earthquake; bombing during war, including many losses from German libraries caused by allied bombing in World War Two; deliberate destruction of libraries by Nazis in Germany, by the Chinese government during the Cultural Revolution, and by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. More recent examples of wartime losses include the destruction of 90% of the collection of the National Library of Sarajevo in 1993. The report also looks at specific threats to the preservation of archives from all these causes, and also from climatic conditions, insects, and removal of archives by occupying forces from one country to another ((van der Hoeven & van Albada, 1996). The list is long and depressing, and a useful reminder of the vulnerability of many of our most valuable research resources.

### **Collaborative collection management**

In such a context there has always been a concern to protect the national research collection of overseas publications, and collaboration at a national level is very well established in area studies librarianship, where the close professional networks of specialist library staff have been well placed to work together. The purpose of such schemes has always been significantly different from that of the large general national schemes concerned with Anglo-American publications. With these it has been the cost of holding multiple copies of the same material in every academic library in the country that has been the main driver. Coming to agreements on systems such as the UK Research Reserve has enabled libraries to free shelving space while maintaining the quality of their service. For area studies collections the starting point is quite different. As the survey on Middle Eastern holdings in the UK, quoted above, indicates clearly, it is not unusual for there to be only one or two copies of an overseas publication in the country, and for most countries the number of holding libraries is small. This has meant that decisions to retain or dispose of overseas publications had much greater implications for the national interest than was normal in academic libraries. Over the years there have been examples of agreements at local, regional and national level in the UK and US to address this problem, with varying degrees of success.

The biggest and best known such collaborative scheme in the United States dates back to the Second World War, and was called the Farmington Plan. Although concerns had been expressed earlier about a lack of foreign research materials, it was the impact of this lack on the ability to carry out the aims of the war that led to a meeting being held at Farmington, Connecticut, in July 1942. By December of that year the Farmington Plan had formulated an ambitious aim:

At least one copy of every book published anywhere in the world following the effective date of the agreement, which might conceivably be of interest to a research worker in America, will be acquired and made available, promptly after publication, by some one of the subscribing libraries. (Proposal for a division of responsibility among

American libraries in the acquisition and recording of library materials. From the Farmington Plan Documents Collection in Harvard University Archives, cited by (Wagner, 2002))

Although never able to fulfil this goal entirely, the Farmington Plan did put in place the mechanisms for collaborative acquisition of monographs and shared information about collections, mechanisms which were to form the basis of later projects. Some funding was received from the Carnegie Foundation to cover set up costs, allowing an office to be set up at Harvard with one part-time member of staff. Acquisition of foreign publications started under the scheme in 1948, covering publications from Sweden, Switzerland and France. The number of libraries participating grew to 48, and each had to agree to pay for their acquisitions in specified subject areas and make a commitment to provide catalogue cards. The country coverage expanded, partly prompted by further wars, to include the Middle East, South and South East Asia, Greece, Finland and Yugoslavia. South Africa was added in 1954, New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga in 1960, and Latin America in 1961. Some major countries such as the Soviet Union, China and Japan were never included. The scheme suffered from the problems that have always been contentious in library collaborations. In the early years, there were complaints about the quality of the items purchased through the official agents, about the costs, and about delays in sending material and in sending catalogue cards. In 1959 the scheme was made more flexible, allowing partners to choose their own suppliers. Area specific committees were set up and these started out to branch out into areas outside the strict scope of the Farmington Plan, starting up microfilming and other initiatives which eventually became independent operations such as CAMP and LACAP. The history of the Farmington Plan, from which much of this information is taken, concludes that it is not possible to judge the success of the scheme because there was no hard data about the percentage of relevant publications it added to US libraries. As a separate activity it gradually faded away but it still leaves a legacy in the various collaborative initiatives that stemmed from it and still exist today (Wagner, 2002)

In the UK serious national attempts at collaborative collection management did not really take place until the early 1990s, following the publication of the Follett Report in 1993, when the role of certain libraries in supporting the national research community through their specialist collections was recognised and rewarded. A substantial injection of funding revolutionised the approach to collaboration in British academic libraries. It was intended to support collaborative collection management, and collections of overseas publications were singled out to benefit from it. A strand of funding was made for those libraries who found themselves supporting users from outside their institution. This “access funding” has long since disappeared, but while it existed it was a tangible reward when the efforts required to maintain and develop a specialist collection could be substantial. Project funding was also made available, with the initial goal of mapping the collections that already existed. The Ukira website cited above was first set up and funded under the name “Mapping Asia”. Projects such as Mapping Asia and COCOREES (for Russian and East European studies) gave libraries the tools to identify and describe their collections of overseas publications and make those descriptions available on the web. The descriptions were intended to inform decisions about collecting policy, rather than being a direct service for users. For the first time it was possible to see in one place where the major collections on Russia or Eastern Europe were held. As a tool for decision making about collection development they were a huge step forward but they had their limitations, because terminology used was open to interpretation. There were no standards for describing the quality of a collection, and a good collection in one library could be very different in size and scope from another.

The next step in the UK, also supported by national funding, was a number of projects designed to address real issues around collaborative collection management. One set out to see whether a scheme could be put in place to support Russian and East European studies and serve as a model for other subjects. The CoFor project (Collaboration for Research),

funded by RLUK and RIN, managed the very difficult task of creating a ten year partnership involving the major research collections for Russian and East European studies in the UK. It put in place agreements for acquisition and retention, and procedures to ensure that any collections that were no longer needed in one library would be transferred to another that had committed to take them. It also produced a toolkit setting out the steps that were necessary to make such a partnership work, emphasising consultation with the academic community, the need for a governing agency with the authority to enforce the agreement, a dedicated team with the time and money to administer the scheme, and the continuing agreement of all partners. (*Cofor collaborative collection management toolkit*, 2006). In practice the scheme proved most useful and most successful in providing a framework to transfer collections from one institution to another, and least successful in collaborative acquisition, where the interests of the home institution always tended to come first. As a model it also proved rather too complex to scale, but in a small way it has been successful in reinforcing the practice of consultation between its partners. It is not yet clear how and where schemes for overseas publications will fit into the proposed new National Monograph Strategy in the UK.

Regional and local schemes have been more of a feature of the US library system. On the Pacific Coast eight member institutions and two affiliates have set up the Pacific Coast Slavic and East European Library Consortium, or Pacslav. By a memorandum of agreement ratified in 1996, members agreed to commit institutional support to collaborative activities in “collection development, acquisitions, cataloging, preservation, document delivery, bibliographic control, and other appropriate technical service areas” (Pacslav, 1996). Its goals when set up were described by one participant thus:

1. Provide adequate research support for their own institutional programs and for other institutions in the region;
2. Maintain and enhance the research base of Slavic and East European collections in the West Coast region;
3. Provide better access for each member library to resources held within the Consortium;
4. Share information on important professional issues

Although stressing the benefits of the network to the staff involved, she also highlights the difficulties of achieving these goals as key personnel move on, funding for cooperative acquisition is unavailable, and projects suffer for lack of staff time to give to them. (Wallach, 2002). These problems are typical of collaborative collection management projects in all areas, and indicate how difficult it is to plan for the national research collection without national funding and support.

Some universities in the US have addressed these questions by setting up local partnerships between neighbouring institutions. In the 2CUL partnership and with the help of funding from the Mellon Foundation Columbia University Libraries and Cornell University share resources, collections, services and expertise in some key areas, including shared librarians for Latin American and Iberian Studies, South East Asian Studies and Slavic and East European Studies. Although part of a larger collaborative partnership, it is in area studies and the international collections that the opportunity has been taken to collaborate closely in terms of collection development, with each partner taking responsibility for developing the collections on different countries. At the end of the first phase of the partnership, which ran from 2009-2012, the impact of some international collections was set out:

In South Asia, 2CUL collections are increasingly distinguished in geographic, linguistic, and subject dimensions. For instance, among the six countries that

comprise South Asia, Cornell collects intensively on Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Columbia collects intensively for Pakistan and Bhutan. Both institutions share responsibilities for India, by far the largest and most studied nation of the region. In terms of language, Cornell collects intensively in Nepali, Newari, and Sinhala, whereas Columbia no longer collects actively in these languages. Columbia collects intensively in Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali; Cornell now collects only minimally in these languages. (Columbia University Libraries/Information Services & Cornell University Library, n.d.)

In 2010 the Librarian of Columbia University, James Neal, had set out a challenge for those of us thinking of collaborative collection management in the international context. He dismisses efforts so far as insubstantial and no more than “a factor of *kum ba yah*: we hold hands, we are warm and fuzzy, we do things together in terms of cooperative cataloging, cooperative collection development, and delivery of materials, but it’s really at a pretty loose, shallow, episodic, and selective level. Those commitments are not sustained.” (Neal, 2010). The type of practical arrangement he has helped to lead is one approach with real impact. It will be interesting to see whether it is copied elsewhere and what that impact will be in the longer term. Local and regional arrangements might well have advantages for the libraries involved and their research communities, but it is hard to see how they can address the problem of gaps in the national collection. National initiatives, however difficult they might be to reach agreement on, must be the only way to ensure that the national research collection of overseas publications is retained and protected.

## 5. Digital resources for area studies

### **Abstract:**

This chapter looks at how well international research is represented in different digital services and at initiatives designed to make research from overseas more accessible. Different models of digitization project are reviewed, from big commercial services to smaller institutional and collaborative projects. The ethics of international digitization projects are considered. Finally, examples are given of projects where area specialist librarians have contributed their professional skills in the digital humanities and in creating and curating new scholarly digital resources.

**Keywords:** ejournals, databases, digital preservation, open access, digitization, partnerships, copyright, ethics, digital humanities, digital curation, digital archiving.

The challenge of acquiring and managing print collections of books and journals published abroad remains a primary concern within area studies librarianship for reasons explored in the chapters on acquisitions and collection management, but the explosion of digital publishing across the world has opened up new opportunities both for area studies researchers and for libraries. Recent conferences on supporting area studies have placed a heavy emphasis on the digital, but, as Dan Hazen points out in a contribution to one such conference, the appropriate balance between print and digital in area studies is still a controversial matter because of the differing take up and reach of digital publishing across the world. Writing in 2013, he says “Publishing in many countries remains embedded in the print world. Until digital infrastructures and markets are more reliable and robust, local expression will continue to favour the analog media that people actually use.” (Hazen, 2013). Clearly this situation is changing year by year, but the pace of change will be different in different parts of the world. For librarians working in area studies this tends to mean that their work with print is supplemented with rather than replaced by the digital in all its various manifestations.

While print books continue to dominate research collections in area studies, most area studies researchers, like most other researchers, will expect to find their journals available online, or at least those titles published by major Western publishers. Alongside those, recent years have seen the appearance of digitised collections of official archives and back-runs of historic journals, newspapers and archives that would not previously have been available to scholars in the west, or not without the funds for a research trip overseas. For researchers working on current events or the recent past the rise of social networks offer new sources of data, and the tools being developed within the growing field of digital humanities are starting to be used to analyse these massive new data sets. The combination of a growth of digital content and a consequent change in expectations and methodologies offers a number of challenges to area studies librarians. New commercially produced resources can be very expensive and the potential user base small, especially when the content is not in English. Usually they do not replace print purchases and new funds have to be found. They can be inconvenient to access and tricky to use and to integrate with existing library systems and standards, and both librarians and researchers need to put in time and effort to learn new skills. But beyond these inconveniences, the development of digital tools means that librarians with specialist skills and collections can find themselves with the chance to help create new digital resources, whether through digitisation projects or by contributing to or curating new media. This chapter explores the current limitations of digital resources for area studies research and looks at some of the ways those limitations are being addressed.

### **Electronic publishing**

Most academic libraries now pay a substantial percentage of their collections budget for electronic journals, and so it seems reasonable to start by looking at these resources to see



how well they serve the researcher with an international focus. When dealing with individual subscriptions or services from individual publishers it is easy to assess how international a library's subscriptions are, but that task is much harder for librarians and for researchers when looking at large online services that aggregate content from different publishers. Most such services available in UK and US universities do not expect their users to be primarily looking for overseas publications and therefore do not reveal at first glance whether or not they hold much of this content. Even when they present their users with lists of titles, publishers or disciplines those lists tend to be so large that getting an overview is hard. An indication of their geographical scope would be a very useful addition to many home screens.

If we take as an example the most popular and widely used gateway to electronic content for humanities and social sciences, Jstor allows browsing by subject, title, or publisher. Their list of subjects does include (in fact it begins with) an entry point for area studies, with 651 titles (at early 2015) arranged under the following headings: African American studies, African studies, American Indian Studies, American Studies, Asian Studies, British Studies, Irish Studies, Jewish studies, Latin American studies, Middle East Studies, and Slavic Studies. The highest number of titles (134) is for Asian Studies, closely followed by American Studies, with only one fewer. At first glance this looks like a very useful feature, but it would be easy to be misled by it into thinking that this is the primary route to the content that area studies researchers need. In fact, the usefulness of this list is limited in two ways: it is limited to journals that focus only on particular regions; and it cannot begin to capture the range of disciplines that might be relevant. Seeing a list of area studies titles might be useful for researchers when choosing where to publish their work, but when looking for relevant research by others it is much less helpful. Almost all the titles listed in Jstor under area studies and its subsets are published in Europe, the UK or the US. The titles listed under British Studies are almost entirely historical pamphlet collections and articles from the 19th century or earlier, made available through digitisation projects, and with a focus on the abolition of slavery. Under the other categories most titles are journals which define themselves only by the region they cover. As an example, anyone choosing the area studies subset to search Jstor for resources on the crisis in Ukraine would miss out on much relevant material. To see what they would be missing even from western scholarship it is only necessary to remove the term "area studies" from the search, and search by country name instead. A Jstor search for Ukraine unlimited by the discipline "area studies" produces 1703 hits, largely from western journals across a range of disciplines, including key titles such as Foreign Affairs as well as standard "area studies" titles such as Harvard Ukrainian Studies. Narrow by "area studies" and there are only 348 hits. Neither search produces any content published in Ukraine itself or in Russia, so researchers have to look elsewhere for that crucial perspective. There is a facility within Jstor to filter results by language but the list reads thus: English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Latin, Portuguese and Spanish – interestingly this is a classic list of colonial powers, and is another clear indication of the geographical limitations of the service, limitations which they themselves are trying to overcome with new initiatives such as their African Access Initiative, described below under digitization. Jstor is a fantastic source of Western scholarship and is essential for all scholars in the humanities and social sciences, but it cannot be used in isolation or a very partial picture will emerge.

To achieve a truly international collection of online academic journals it will be necessary to take out multiple subscriptions managed in very different ways. In the case of relatively wealthy countries such as China and Russia the solution is usually to take out subscriptions to very expensive commercial services that have negotiated rights to reproduce publications from those countries. As these can only be read by small numbers of researchers with appropriate language skills the cost per view can be depressingly high, and a successful bid for funding will often depend on a special case being made for the intrinsic importance to the

institution of the research. For poorer less developed countries the costs might be less but the administrative and technical overheads could be significantly higher.

It is clear that no matter how well-resourced our libraries are, depending on our standard set of publishers' resources and aggregators will provide only a partial window into relevant research, at best. The problem of how to access peer-reviewed research published outside a few privileged parts of the world is being addressed in different ways for different countries. Whether the solution is commercial or non-commercial tends to depend on the country or region in question. For Africa, a non-profit enterprise based in South Africa called "African Journals Online" provides a gateway free of charge to the work of African academics, making it accessible not only to Western academics but to other African scholars, and attempting to change the model whereby knowledge and resource and information flow only one way. In October 2014 they hosted 479 journals. As they say on their website,

"mainly due to difficulties accessing them, African-published research papers have been under-utilised, under-valued and under-cited in the international and African research arenas. The internet is a good way to change this, but many hundreds of worthy, peer-reviewed scholarly journals publishing from Africa cannot host their content online in isolation because of resource limitations and the digital divide".  
[ajol.info]

Launched in 1998, AJOL began as part of the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publication (INASP), an international development charity. Over the years they have expanded their coverage and range of partners, moved to local African management and developed a system entirely based on Open Source tools. The content is not always open access, but when the title is a charged one the price to download depends on the country of the requester, identified by IP address and divided into low-income country, lower middle-income country, upper middle-income country and high-income country, using World Bank lists to categorise the countries.

African Journals Online is just one example of the work done by INASP, which aims "to improve access, production and use of research information and knowledge, so that countries are equipped to solve their development challenges." (INASP, n.d.) Among their other activities they work with countries ranging from Bangladesh to China to disseminate research being produced in developing countries. Their partners include the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), who developed the Open Journal System for open access journal publishing, and CrossRef with whom they develop their "Journals Online". At the time of writing (October 2014) they manage JOLs for Bangladesh, Latin America (largely Spanish language titles from Honduras and Nicaragua), Mongolia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Three other systems are now managed in-country. These include the system for Africa, described above, and services for the Philippines and Vietnam. These systems are very useful sources of information for libraries, but the payment model they offer is designed for the individual researcher, and libraries are encouraged to take out subscriptions to titles that are meant to be used regularly. This takes us back to the complexities of acquiring and managing subscriptions that were discussed in the chapter on acquisitions, complexities from which there is really no escape.

While methods for publishing journals online are now well established, even if not universally applied, the e-book industry for academic books is still complex and underdeveloped. Even in the UK academic libraries are confronted with multiple rental and purchase models, some of which are alarmingly expensive, and with an array of different attitudes to digital rights management, creating a landscape that is bewildering for users and a challenge for library staff to manage. The open access movement is just beginning to make a difference, but we are still a long way from open access to the scholarly monograph online as a default position. Most foreign books needed by area studies researchers are simply not available as e-books and they are even less likely to be available on open access in subject or

institutional repositories. The summary of global e-book publishing prepared by Duke University library staff and already referenced in the chapter on acquisitions highlights some of the problems. These include a tiny market share for e-books in some countries (less than 1.5% of the overall book market in South Africa), and in the case of India and Pakistan a lack of any data on the amount of e-book publishing. Where it is more prevalent it is often, as in the case of Japan, the popular market that dominates and the number of academic e-books is relatively small. Often the technical platforms used will be unfamiliar to an overseas audience (and to overseas library systems staff), as is the case with the widespread use of the Founder Apabi platform in China. Finally, piracy is often an enormous problem. It can be hard to know with any electronic publication whether it is available legally, and in some countries it is most likely that it is not. In these circumstances it is clear that the move to e-books for overseas publications in our area studies collections is likely to be slow and careful, as trust needs to be built. Major vendors from countries such as Russia, China and the Middle East are starting to offer e-book packages but interest is still low, while librarians continue to discuss the pros and cons at their conferences. The most encouraging initiatives are those such as the African Books Collective. Established in Oxford in the 1980s by African publishers, it is a distributor for scholarly, literary and children's books from Africa, including titles in African languages. Supplying its services free of charge to publishers, it now acts on behalf of 149 independent African publishers from 24 countries, using digital technology to provide a print on demand service for those who prefer print, and 800 titles as e-books converted to western e-book platforms.

One huge advantage of the digital revolution is that a wealth of primary documents and data is now available online from across the world in a way that was never possible before. Until recently area studies librarians would collect on paper as many statistical yearbooks, official publications and reports as they could. Usually they would be available only after a long delay and at a substantial cost. Now this information is usually available online on the institutional website, often taking the place of paper publication and usually free of charge. Newspapers, television and radio broadcasts, and even some feature films are easily accessible on the web. This has made many researchers independent of their library for access to these sources, or at least it has until they need something that is no longer current. That is when the variability and inadequacy of many institutional archiving policies become apparent, and the content is simply no longer available. In the case of mass media this is often deliberate as the archive is being managed on a commercial basis and is available at a cost, but in many other cases there is no accessible archive.

Digital preservation and archiving is a matter of serious concern to area studies librarians aiming to provide a comprehensive research collection of overseas publications, especially in cases where they know they hold collections unique or rare in their countries. Moving to digital in those circumstances is simply not an option as a replacement for print if they cannot be confident that the material will remain available indefinitely. In many parts of the world, the problem of digital preservation has not yet been seriously addressed, even if individual titles and publishers do appear at first glance to have a reliable digital presence. Services such as LOCKSS (Lots of copies keep stuff safe) and Clocks (Controlled LOCKSS), both based in the United States, have technical and administrative mechanisms in place that provide reassurance to participating libraries and publishers that their digital content will be accessible in perpetuity. Their services are available in principle to partners worldwide but take up has inevitably been by the bigger, more familiar and wealthier names who have been managing electronic publications for many years. One review of the situation in Latin America describes how successful approaches taking into account the interests of librarians, archivists and others alongside technical experts have been developed and applied in North America, Europe and Australia (Voutssas, 2012), but have not yet taken hold in the less developed world. Depressingly, the author claims to have found very few digital preservation initiatives in Latin America, with none in most countries and just a handful in Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Mexico. He lists six factors that hinder progress in

digital preservation. They are the following: 1) cultural, in terms of a lack of awareness of the issue; 2) technological, where there is a lack of the necessary infrastructure, expertise and security; 3) legal, involving the need to protect intellectual property rights and privacy; 4) methodological, in terms of tools, standards and comprehensive metadata; 5) economic, where he includes the cost of training staff as well as the initial and recurrent costs of digital preservation; and 6) social, where plans are needed to provide access to the whole population across the digital divide which is so much more serious in the less developed world. Taken together these demonstrate clearly how large a task addressing this problem is in an environment with many other priorities. It is clearly in the interests both of foreign scholars and of local authors, publishers and librarians for digital publications to be preserved wherever they are produced, and if they are not there is a serious risk that they will be lost for ever. Some certainly already have been.

Similar constraints hold back the take up of the open access movement. The recent requirement by government and research funders to make scholarly research outputs in the UK and elsewhere in Europe open access has the potential to transform access to scholarly research by the public across the world. In principle any member of the public with an Internet connection will be able to read free of charge journal articles and conference proceedings in any discipline, and increasingly they will be accompanied by the research data used to prove their conclusions. The research could be recreated and the conclusions verified or challenged. Needless to say it will be less easy to do this in countries where access to electricity and to education is limited to the privileged, rather than being something that can be taken for granted. The *OpenDOAR* Directory of Open Access Repositories based in the UK, provides an authoritative searchable and browsable database of open access repositories worldwide. It also generates a dynamic pie chart showing the proportion of repositories by continent ([http://www.open\\_doar.org/](http://www.open_doar.org/)). In early 2015 that showed Europe well in the lead, at 44.7% with 1271 open access repositories, followed by North America at 19.7%, Asia at 19.3%, and South America at 8.9%. The rest of the world makes up the remaining 7.4%. Clearly this is another example of the imbalance between the global north and the global south, that has the potential to allow even greater dominance of scholarship from the US and Europe. For that reason academic libraries across the world have been in the forefront of campaigns in their countries to promote open access to scholarship, and their experiences have been captured in a special issue of the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* from 2013 which looks at the experience of introducing Open Access in China, Argentina, Africa, the Netherlands and India. While the perspective from China is relatively positive (Hu, Luo, & Liu, 2013) and the article on Argentina shows significant progress (Miguel, Bongiovanni, Gómez, & Bueno-de-la-Fuente, 2013) while remaining at a relatively low level, the article on Africa highlights some of the problems that hold back the take up of open access. They include lack of awareness, lack of technical infrastructure, lack of expertise and lack of relevant policy frameworks (Nwagwu, 2013).

One enemy of open access across the world is Internet censorship, a factor highlighted in an article on the growth of open access in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. As the authors point out, open access scholarship can only thrive in an open society and this cannot be assumed in many parts of the world:

"even as researchers in these countries open multiple new channels to the global scholarly community, their governments and those of the other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) nation-states, are developing a reputation as innovators in a different area - that of Internet filtering and access control." (Donabedian & Carey, 2011)

Understanding the political environment and the openness of any society has to be a key part of the picture when looking at how scholarly research is created and communicated nationally and internationally.

## Digitisation projects

Digitization projects have transformed the scholarly landscape across the world over the last twenty years or so. Although digitization has been happening for longer – Project Gutenberg began the mammoth task of rekeying print texts in 1971 – it was the creation of the web that gave digitized texts a popular platform, and there is now an enormous and ever growing volume of material available on a mixture of commercial and openly accessible sites. Many of these refer to themselves as “international” or even “global”, but this tends to mean something different in each case, and as with e-publishing it is necessary to examine each service in detail to establish exactly how international it is, and where the limits of its global reach might be.

Of all the large scale digitization projects the best known and potentially one of the most useful is of course Google Books, which has been digitizing the collections of some of the largest research libraries in Europe and the US since 2004. With a history fraught with controversy because of disputes over copyright and problems with quality control, Google books now describes its library digitization partnership on its website, rather oddly, as no more than “an enhanced card catalog of the world’s books”.(Google books, n.d.). From the perspective of a researcher interested in international publications, it is the range and quality of the collections held by the libraries that have chosen to partner with Google that give the service its strength, particularly for older titles that are out of copyright and therefore available in full text. The original “Big 5” libraries who signed a deal with Google back in 2004 were the following: Oxford (the Bodleian), Harvard, Stanford, Michigan, and the New York Public Library. As of early 2015 Google Books claims to work with “over 40 libraries around the world” (Google Books, n.d.) but names only 21 of them on its website, from the UK, the US, Europe and Japan. Although the contributing libraries do not appear to be a truly global list, their international collections are some of the strongest and widest ranging anywhere in the world. The ability to search such an international corpus of material in multiple languages has to be set against the limitations on access to full text when deciding how useful it will be for any particular area of research. While clearly most useful for older publications it is also being used as a corpus of content that can be analysed, even if not viewed, using its Ngram tool, although that covers content only up until 2008. There is more on this below under digital humanities.

One service which, like Google, has faced a challenge to its stand on copyright matters is the Hathi Trust, which was established in the US in 2008, primarily as a place where the digital content available to a number of partner libraries could be preserved. Its Digital Library allows access to full text created under a variety of different digitization programmes, including Google Books, and a recent US court ruling declared that this was an acceptable example of “fair use”, particularly because the intention was digital preservation and wider accessibility of the content. For users outside the US wishing to access this content such a ruling creates a problem, as copyright law varies from country to country and there is, for example, no concept of fair use in UK copyright law. The Hathi Trust makes a point on its website of warning users that material out of copyright in the US might not be so elsewhere, but it is an issue that complicates the use of any digital collection across borders.

Since the advent of Google Books a number of large non-commercial international digitization projects have been set up, more or less overtly in opposition to it. The proposal to establish the European Digital Library, now called Europeana, dates from 2005, just as the Google Book project was getting under way. Launched in 2008, Europeana is publicly funded through the European Union to provide free access to Europe’s cultural heritage, and it provides a truly multilingual portal (at least for European languages) to digital content from many of Europe’s national and research libraries, museums and archives. Run by the contributing libraries themselves through the Europeana Foundation and with developments funded through successive projects, Europeana has not encountered the legal and other

problems faced by Google books, but it has grown rather more slowly, and of course its geographic scope is more limited.

The World Digital Library is a service established by the Library of Congress with rather similar goals to Europeana in terms of the type of digital content it hosts, which includes resources in a variety of different formats representing material of cultural and historical importance. It differs from Europeana in its more international range of partners and a different and more challenging set of goals. Funded by UNESCO, it aims to make available "free of charge and in multilingual format, significant primary materials from all countries and cultures." Partners include libraries and archives in a number of countries in the developing world and the interface is available in the six official languages of the United Nations: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish; alongside Portuguese because of the substantial input from the National Library of Brazil. The WDL claims to make some content from every member country of the United Nations. In some cases the amount of content is small, and the whole site currently (as of February 2015) claims to make searchable 11,302 items about 194 countries ("World Digital Library," n.d.) This makes it significantly smaller than its rivals but it has other aspirations, one of which is to build capacity for digitization in its partner organizations and help "narrow the digital divide within and between countries." To that end it has supplied digitization equipment, systems, support and funds to Brazil, Russia, Egypt, Iraq and Uganda, allowing the collections to stay in situ to be digitized, and, equally significantly, building skills and capacity in those countries.

This imperative to help minimise the impact of the digital divide has also led JSTOR to expand its range of digitized content and review its access arrangements in relation to less developed countries. Through their African Access Initiative they now provide access to all archived journals and to their primary source collections free of charge to all not-for-profit institutions in Africa. This provides equal access to Western scholars and scholars affiliated to African institutions to much western scholarship, and also to digitized collections created by Aluka.org, a not-for-profit organization which was originally part of Ithaka and whose goal is to disseminate high quality scholarly content from and about Africa and to make African resources now held elsewhere accessible once again within Africa. Now integrated into JSTOR, it offers two collections: "African cultural heritage sites and landscapes", and "Struggles for freedom in Southern Africa". The content of the former supports a wide range of disciplines and features an equally wide range of formats, including photographs, slides, 3D models, GIS data sets, excavation notes, maps, and site plans". "Struggles for freedom in Southern Africa" includes: "oral histories, speeches, nationalist publications, fully digitized books, titles and pamphlets" and has been collected from Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, UK and US, with the bulk from the US.

Partnerships of various sorts have been essential to the largest and most successful international digitization projects. There are many examples which use different models of partnership to bring together scattered and inaccessible resources from across the world. One such is the International Dunhuang Project, which is publishing manuscripts, paintings, textiles and artefacts from the archaeological sites of the Eastern Silk Road. Like many long running projects it began with a focus on cataloguing and conservation but has now moved into digitization and of March 2015 has almost half a million images online, all freely reusable ([www.idp.uk](http://www.idp.uk)). Partners in the UK (the British Library), Russia, Japan, Germany, France, Korea and China all host a version of the site in their own language and a wider range of partners provide data or expertise. Collecting scattered materials from across the world and reunited them virtually is also one of the goals of the Afghanistan Digital Library, a project led by New York University, (<http://afghanistandl.nyu.edu/>), which is trying to recreate the publishing legacy of Afghanistan after years of war have put it at risk. The first phase digitized the holdings of a number of private collectors outside Afghanistan, alongside material from the British Library and New York University Library, while the second phase is working to develop capacity in Afghanistan, in collaboration with staff at the National

Archives in Kabul. The Digital Library of the Caribbean (dloc.com) is a partnership of 39 academic institutions and academic libraries both in the Caribbean and abroad, and it both digitizes content from private and institutional collections and provides a single gateway to that content. The librarian responsible for running the Southeast Asia Digital Library Project (SEADL) has highlighted some of the considerations to take into account when managing a complex international partnership. SEADL is based at Northern Illinois University but was based on a complex matrix of partnerships involving a number of US libraries through the US organisation for Southeast Asian libraries, Cormosea, as well as more than 20 partners at various times in Southeast Asia. It has digitized over 100,000 objects, "including books, journal, manuscripts, photographs, videos and archival documents". Funding came from Ticia, the US Department of Education Technological Innovation and Cooperation for Foreign Information Access. This funding program was cancelled in 2011, when the second 4 year tranche of funding to this project was cut to two years. It is hardly surprising that communication was one of the greatest challenges, for both technical and cultural reasons. Email was fundamental to the American way of working but was not standard practice in the region, and some activities did not succeed because there was no reliable way to communicate according to the demands and timescales of a funded project. It was essential to have funding for travel so that face to face communication could be used to build relations between project partners. Differing levels of experience with costing projects were also a problem, not helped by the fact that the American government broke its commitment to fund the work. Trust on all sides is a fundamental part of a project like this, and the consequences of a broken promise are likely to extend beyond the bounds of any single project (Phan, 2013).

Commercial publishers have often played a very important role in large scale digitization projects which have transformed academic research, especially when collections of primary sources have been made available to the researcher's desktop. Notable recent examples include the Stalin Digital Archive, a partnership between Yale University Press and the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, which has so far digitized around 28,000 documents relating to his private and official activities. This includes much of his correspondence, both personal and with world leaders such as President Roosevelt. Like many such projects this is not simply a commercial activity, but has relied on substantial academic input and a number of donors, including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

It is clear from the examples above that managing a digitization project with an international scope is always going to be challenging because of issues around communication, selection, copyright and intellectual property, and accessibility. Successful projects have had to take these issues into account and ensure that they have the funding and the right skills to deal with them. One of the most difficult problems, and the one that prevents many digitization projects getting underway at all, is that of copyright. As we have seen above, this has caused problems for projects such as Google Books, and severely limits the range of twentieth century titles that they can make available. With the limited resources of an academic library it quickly becomes obvious that the time and effort required to identify and make contact with multiple rights owners in other countries cannot be justified. This is a particular problem with collections of archives or other unpublished material, where there might be hundreds or even thousands of individuals or organizations potentially involved, some of whom will be descendants of the original creators of the material. In an article describing the work done by Northwestern University to digitize their Africana holdings over many years the authors describe how they have dealt with an array of issues including copyright problems and issues of cultural sensitivity (Guittar & Easterbrook, 2012). Describing an experience that will be reassuring to many libraries who finally take a risk and make digitised content available when they have not been able to establish the copyright owner, they tell how their attempts to identify copyright owners of a collection of political posters met with no response after many attempts, but once they were available online with

an appropriate disclaimer, they were identified by the relevant organizations who were pleased to have access to them. They also describe how they have worked in partnership with Aluka, described above, and also over many years with CAMP (the Cooperative Africana Microform Project), one of the long standing initiatives initially set up to create a central collection in the US of foreign government publications, serials and newspapers from across the world, via the Center for Research libraries. These projects: CAMP (Africana), LAMP (Latin America), MEMP (Middle East), SEEMP (Slavic and Eastern Europe), SAMP (South Asia), and SEAM (Southeast Asia), began with the creation of microform facsimiles, as so much digitization did, but are now also actively involved in digitization.

The question of how digitization is carried out and by whom can be a difficult one when the digitization involves material from another country. Digitization is usually considered a good thing for a number of reasons that are widely accepted and often stated: it can be enormously helpful in bringing together scattered collections in a single virtual home, accessible from anywhere by anyone with an internet connection. Physical collections relating to particular countries might be held for historic reasons in libraries far from their origin, and digitization can make them accessible in their country of origin without having to relocate them physically. These assumptions have been analysed and criticized by two African scholars who have looked closely at the ethics of digitization projects operating across borders, especially when it comes to the Global North digitizing the cultural heritage of the Global South. Johannes Britz and Peter Lor, who are cited elsewhere on the ethics of acquiring material from other countries, have identified the economic, political, legal and moral questions that need to be taken into account when considering a digitization project in Africa, and they have drawn up a set of guidelines based on international principles of human rights. (J. Britz & Lor, 2004). Their starting point is the lack of access to basic infrastructure in many parts of Africa: "If African documentary heritage is digitized, how many Africans will be able to benefit?" The question applies not just to individuals, but to libraries in Africa that might not be able to afford commercial subscriptions and will therefore be unable to provide access for their users to the cultural heritage of their own country. From the perspective of area studies librarianship we naturally think first of our local users carrying out research on other parts of the world, but once we become involved in international collaborations other interests also need to be taken into account if the partnership is to work well. Britz and Lor argue that the following rights should be respected when digitizing African material: moral and cultural rights, ownership rights, economic rights, and the right of a nation to control its own documentary heritage. If these are honoured then digitization would be carried out in a way that respected local culture, identified the creators of the material, involved the owners in selecting what should be digitized, respected intellectual property rights, provided access free of charge or at a reasonable cost in the country of origin, and allowed the owners to benefit from any commercial transactions.

One problematic question highlighted by Britz and Lor concerns the process by which material is selected for digitization, because of the potential reach of digital content and the way it can be used to alter the way peoples and events are perceived. One example of this is given in a recent book that uses web and social media as source material for research into memory in post-socialist Europe. A single image of a 19<sup>th</sup> century bill of sale for a Roma woman is singled out for its role in helping to change the stories that were prevalent about Roma history, culture and tradition. The dissemination of such a powerful representation of the role of slavery in the history of the Roma people is shown by the author to undermine some myths that were deeply embedded in the popular understanding (Reading, 2013). As more official records of all kinds are digitized and become widely accessible they are used more and more as evidence to verify or dispute particular accounts of the past, and hence they can have enormous power. Selection of material for digitization now carries a greater responsibility, if there is a risk that it can present a biased or incomplete picture of events that are still live subjects of debate in their countries of origin.



The same book includes a number of chapters that use various digital tools to analyse content in a variety of different digital services, from Google books to social media, to attempt to establish how certain events in the recent past are being remembered and described. One such tool, used here to analyse attitudes of Russians to certain key events in their history (Etkind, 2013), is the Google Books Ngram Viewer, which allows statistical analysis of the digitised content of Google Books between 1800 and 2008. As the tool works with a number of languages, including Russian, and the contributing libraries have such strong international collections the number of overseas publications that can be analysed in this way is significant, but the process does raise questions about the underlying quality of the data and any limitations to the range of material that is included in the analysis. Librarians are used to selecting content to digitize based on purely practical criteria: the funding available, the physical condition of the material, any copyright problems, and the immediate priorities of their users or funders. As digitization is usually an expensive and time consuming process, most libraries running digitization projects have to be selective, although the percentage of material that remains undigitized is often unclear or not stated at all. The quality of the OCR can also be variable, if not downright poor, and again these limitations are usually left for the researcher to find out for themselves, rather than being clearly stated at the outset. As data mining of digitized and born-digital content becomes more prevalent and is taken up as part of the everyday repertoire of tools available to researchers, librarians could usefully be thinking seriously about the implications of the choices they make when they embark on these projects.

Specialist librarians with skills in languages and deep knowledge of other cultures alongside their professional skills in metadata and systems can often be vital to producing high quality, carefully curated digital repositories of foreign material. When working on international content area studies librarians have often worked with commercial partners and as part of international academic projects, as well as being involved in the digitization projects being carried out in their own libraries. One notable example is when staff at the Library of Congress contributed their expertise to the digitization of the Comintern Archive held in the Russian State Archives for Social and Political History (RGASPI). A truly international project, it involved scholars from fifty four countries and the selection of one million pages to be digitized from the total of 20 million in the collection. The role of the specialist staff at the Library of Congress was to ensure that all the 175,000 names and 20,000 subject descriptors could be searched accurately in Russian and in English. It is hardly surprising that the Library of Congress carefully credits every individual involved in this massive enterprise. (Library of Congress, n.d.-c).

A recent UK report shows that while researchers welcome the range of digital resources now available to them they are aware of and concerned about incomplete and selective services, lack of links between different sites and lack of sustainability (Research Information Network, 2011). It is not surprising that it is usually very large-scale and well-resourced digitization projects that seem to be most successful in producing high quality output that can be trusted by researchers both to provide what they need and to be available in the long term. Often that means that the project is not freely available on the web, but involves a commercial partner with its high costs matched by high purchase or subscription prices. Dealing with rights issues becomes much easier once you are in partnership with either a commercial publisher or with libraries and archives in the countries in question, or possibly with both. When planning any digitization project that includes overseas material, especially when it is in more than one language, the obstacles to success can be daunting, but with an international project it is usually partnership of one sort or another that helps to overcome these obstacles.

### **Creating and curating digital content**

Managing electronic publications and digitizing our collections are now well established areas of professional work, complicated though they might be. In both areas it is very

important that area studies librarians become actively involved so that their skills can be used to create services that are genuinely useful for their research community and genuinely open to scholars worldwide. If they do not do so then the gap will be filled by commercial publishers and access will inevitably be restricted to those who can afford to pay. These are not, however, the only ways in which area studies librarians can work with digital content. With the growth over recent years of the digital humanities there are great new opportunities for libraries to become involved in the creation of new scholarly digital resources and area studies librarians have often led the way.

Over the last decade or more digital humanities has grown as a new academic area in our universities, and specialist librarians from all disciplines are becoming involved as equal partners. Area studies collections are almost by definition special collections, and as such they often form the basis for productive collaborations with digital humanities scholars. Digitized texts, from single works to large corpora, images, maps, sound recordings and data can all be used as the basis of digital humanities projects which apply new tools in text and data mining and analysis to them. Crowdsourcing can help to provide information about the material that could never be available any other way. Library staff can contribute not only their knowledge of the collections, but their skills in systems, digitization, project management, digital preservation, copyright, and metadata, to make these projects a success. Alongside those traditional library skills translated to a digital age, librarians were early adopters of techniques such as text encoding. At the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign library staff not only used TEI (text encoding initiative) and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) but ran a series of workshops between 2004 and 2007 on working with Slavic digital texts, training researchers in those same techniques. There are many examples of successful collaborations of this kind. At the Beinecke Library at Yale University their Joseph Brodsky archive has been the core of a project called the Digital Brodsky Lab. Digital Humanities scholars work with library and IT staff (another useful partner in such projects) to apply text mining tools to digitized texts from the Brodsky collection.

Working with the digital humanities is one way for area studies librarians to update their skills and demonstrate their continuing value to the research community, but it is not the only route that they are taking. It has become obvious over the past few years that there is a huge gap to fill in curating the web and social media, and some libraries are stepping in to fill this gap before the historical sources of the future disappear. Major political events have attracted particular attention. The UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies Library have been using twitter to disseminate links to primary sources of information on the crisis in Ukraine and are now creating a web-based resource guide using this content. The American University in Cairo developed a website called the University on the Square, aimed at documenting the events in Egypt of early 2011. Their aim has been to create “a participatory archives initiative that seeks to preserve the momentous events of early 2011 and events as they unfold”. They have collected still images and video, original art, and other websites, and they have worked with oral historians to interview participants in the events. Alongside this new resource they have worked to build traditional resources such as print collections and research guides (Runyon & Houlihan, 2012). In some countries certain content is particularly vulnerable to censorship for social or political reasons, and Liladhar R. Pendse has described the tools she has used at the University of California (Berkeley) Library to archive web pages from the LGBT community in Russia and Eastern Europe. (Pendse, 2014).

In all these activities described above librarians with a combination of specialist area, language and professional skills are ideally placed to bring those skills into the digital arena, creating new resources that are open and accessible and provide real value to researchers. There is now a substantial body of good practice and experience to draw upon that goes well beyond the management of subscriptions to electronic journals, vitally important though that remains. The information environment for area studies research is becoming ever more

complex, with the continuing need to manage rare print resources coexisting with new opportunities created by the digital revolution across the world.

## 6. Resource Discovery and Systems: barriers to access in area studies

### **Abstract:**

This chapter looks at the reasons why material needed by area studies researchers can be hard to find. It covers uncatalogued collections, problems with classification systems and cataloguing standards, including unintended bias. The complexity of dealing with foreign languages is highlighted and the impact of transliteration and original script cataloguing described. As researchers use more digital resources created outside the Library the need for skills training in the different standards likely to be used is emphasized.

**Keywords:** hidden collections, classification, cataloguing, standards, names, transliteration, original script cataloguing, access, barriers, skills.

Given the specialised nature and relative rarity of area studies collections, whether print or digital, how easy is it for the research community to identify and access the material that they need? This chapter looks at some of the barriers to access that might hinder an area studies researcher, and at the implications for the way libraries manage their systems and services. These barriers can be caused by the existence of “hidden” collections, inappropriate classification schemes, variations in cataloguing, metadata, and technical standards for foreign language collections, and licence restrictions. They are not unique to area studies, by any means, but taken together they can create significant problems for this user community.

Despite, or maybe as a result of, the multitude of resource discovery tools now available a recent UK report on barriers to accessing research information content has shown that frustration with accessing essential resources can cause significant delays to researchers, or even cause them to abandon projects altogether. The impact on their research was considered to be significant by nearly a fifth of those surveyed and the figures was higher for researchers in the humanities and in the social sciences (Research Information Network, 2009). For this broadly defined user community the issues identified were described as being more to do with access than with identifying the resource in the first place. As resource discovery tools proliferate a lack of hits is unlikely to be seen as a problem, but getting to the text from a hit in Google or Google Scholar can be a challenge for anyone. These issues are not specific to area studies research, but specialist librarians will realise something that perhaps many researchers do not: any barriers to access for their research community are exacerbated by multiple issues with the way that overseas publications are handled in resource discovery tools, making it very difficult for researchers to identify all the sources that might be useful to them, let alone to access them. If international research is to be properly supported in our universities, these issues of resource discovery and access need to be explicitly identified and researchers made much more aware of the best ways to navigate such a dauntingly complex information landscape.

Academic libraries have always put a good deal of money and thought into how best to make their collections as widely discoverable and accessible as possible. This has become much more complex now that so much content is not owned by the Library or held in hard copy, but is licensed and accessed electronically, and can often be discovered by using tools such as Google or Google Scholar that are outside the control of the library. At the time that most area studies collections were created the process of resource discovery was managed entirely within each library and directly linked to access. Identifying the right library was a matter of trial and error. Personal recommendations would often be helpful, as would the numerous printed directories of specialist library holdings. The only way to be sure that a library had the item you needed would be to visit, often at considerable cost. Catalogues were physical objects, either on card or in massive and unwieldy volumes which could only be accessed in the library, although a few of the most important were published and made available in other major research libraries. One such example of an important and widely used printed catalogue was the *Dictionary Catalogue of the Slavonic Division* of the New

York Public Library, published in 44 volumes by G.K. Hall in 1974. Most people would assume that the digital age has made such tools irrelevant, but that is not the case. Even now the website of the New York Public Library includes the following statement:

Although the Library hopes eventually to create online records for all of its unique Cyrillic materials, at present, readers seeking Cyrillic research materials acquired and catalogued prior to 1972 must consult both the [online catalog](#) and the 44-volume printed *Dictionary Catalogue of the Slavonic Division* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1974). A public access copy is available in the [General Research Division](#). Presently, some 80,000 records are available only in the *Dictionary Catalogue*. (New York Public Library, n.d.). <http://www.nypl.org/about/divisions/general-research-division/slavic>. Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2014)

Such legacy systems from our pre-digital past are still a feature of most of our greatest research libraries, and for many reasons overseas publications are disproportionately likely to be hidden away in them. Any researcher wanting to track down older overseas publications will need to become familiar not only with multiple modern systems and standards, but with the working practices of previous generations of librarians and scholars. If they do not do so they run the risk of missing significant amounts of relevant material that they may never realise exists.

### **Hidden collections**

There are many ways in which important research materials can be hidden effectively, if inadvertently, from the area studies researcher. The term “hidden collections” is generally used to describe collections that are not included in online catalogues or resource discovery tools, and therefore cannot be found by a researcher carrying out an online literature search at a distance from the library. At an extreme it includes those rather sad collections of dusty books and pamphlets to be found in library basements across the world. Somehow never getting to the top of the priority list, they have not found their way into the Library catalogue at all and are therefore completely invisible to the potential user (and most library staff), who will never know they exist. The problem is that they tend to be the more difficult and unusual items, rather than Anglo-American books that are quick and easy to catalogue. Foreign language material is extremely likely to find itself in this category, perhaps because there was nobody on the library staff at the time it was received with the skills to deal with it. As years go by and it is unused it becomes less and less of a priority. Slightly more discoverable, but only slightly, is that part of the collection in our oldest and best libraries that predates the online catalogue and has never made the journey from a paper catalogue record to an electronic one. The example above from the New York Public Library includes 80,000 such items, all in the Cyrillic alphabet, but at least they can be discovered by a scholar with access to the printed volumes. In most cases such material can be found only by those who are aware of the existence of the card catalogue or equivalent and are able to visit the library to use it.

The problem of these hidden collections of research material started to be seriously addressed in the UK in the mid-1990s following the publication of the Report of the Joint Funding Council's Libraries Review Group, affectionately known by everyone as the Follett report after its chair, Professor Sir Brian Follett. The reason for the affection in which this report is widely held is that it set the agenda for a transformation in research library funding in the UK which had the result of opening up access to many important research collections. Although the Group's original remit was to consider the result of the increase in student numbers across the higher education sector, it identified the changing research methods that the digital revolution would make available to everyone, student or researcher. It recognised that “much unique material, particularly early books and books printed outside the UK, is often still accessible only through the manual catalogue systems of libraries” and asked for a review to be set up into the costs and benefits of a national strategy for retrospective

conversion. The Follett report made a simple and bold recommendation, that: "the funding councils should set aside up to 10 million a year of their research funding to distribute recurrently outside the main formulaic allocation to support the additional costs of specialised research collections widely used by researchers across the system as a whole." (HEFCE, 1993)

The funding awarded to research libraries as a result of the Follett report and its successor, the Anderson report, set up to report within a year on strategy for research libraries, (Anderson, 1998) paid for large amounts of backlog cataloguing, retrospective conversion of older catalogue records, archive cataloguing and conservation of rare books. Funding was also made available to recognise the costs faced by those specialist libraries which supported research communities beyond their own institutions, of which area studies libraries were among the beneficiaries. This initiative allowed many research libraries to make substantial improvements very quickly in resource discovery and access for researchers, and set a model for national library strategy which was envied by many other countries. Successive reviews carried out over the next decade by the Research Support Libraries Programme and the Research Support Libraries Group were to build on this strategic work, although the availability of funding for cataloguing was never again to feature.

Even such substantial investment as followed the Follett report, although it made an enormous difference, was not enough to eliminate the enormous and growing problem of uncatalogued or inadequately catalogued research material. By its very nature, the extent of the problem of hidden collections in our libraries cannot be precisely known. A 2010 survey of UK libraries carried out jointly by the London Library and RLUK reported an estimate of 13 million uncatalogued volumes, with over 4 million more having inadequate catalogue records. Amongst those undiscoverable items "foreign language material and formats which require particular skills and expertise (maps, music, archives) are heavily represented." (Mertens & García-Ontiveros, 2012). Responses were received from 75 separate institutions, not all of which were in higher education. They included 32 specialist libraries such as museums and subscription libraries, reflecting the emphasis given many years before in the Anderson report to the "small but valuable collections" to be found outside the university sector. The importance of those collections was highlighted in the 2003 report of the Research Support Libraries Group (RSLG), which recommended that "for researchers in the arts and humanities, area studies and languages and the social sciences, those online catalogues should extend as far as possible to resources held beyond the higher education sector" (Research Support Libraries Group, 2003).

As a result of these initiatives dedicated funding has been set aside to catalogue some of these hidden collections inside and outside higher education and add them to COPAC. The COPAC website emphasises the rare and special nature of the material that can be accessed via its search engine, and their contributing collections now include such special collections as the Russian and East European holdings of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge and the Middle East and Arab World Document Unit of the University of Exeter.

Systematic and nationally coordinated attempts to improve access to rare research collections such as that implemented by COPAC are helping to address the problem of hidden collections, although we know that there is still much very expensive and time-consuming work to be done. Alongside tools such as COPAC that operate at item level there is still an important role for directories, usually web-based nowadays, which bring together descriptions of the holdings at collection level in specialist libraries. They have often been produced as an essential foundation of the various collaborative collection management projects that attempt to coordinate, formally or informally, national research collections of overseas publications. Keeping them updated once project funding has run out has usually proved more of a problem, and any efforts are usually coordinated by the specialist library organizations.

Knowing where specialist area studies collections are located and what they are likely to contain remains very important to area studies researchers. The final report of the RSLG in 2003 found that they were the most heavily dependent of all categories of researchers on access to libraries outside their own institution: “72 per cent of area studies and language researchers, 53 per cent of researchers in the arts and humanities, 36 per cent of social scientists and 28 per cent of researchers in the medical and biological sciences regard access to other university libraries beyond the home institution as essential.” (Research Support Libraries Group, 2003). The discrepancy in subject areas is unlikely to have changed in the intervening decades, although the numbers might well have done. Nowadays it is not only access to the physical collections which obliges researchers to visit other libraries, although they continue to be particularly important to many working in history or the humanities. Most commercial digital resources are also available only to registered members of the subscribing institutions because of restrictive clauses in the licences. Other people, including researchers from other institutions, may use the resource but only within the subscribing library. This restricts access to many essential archives of newspapers and official publications as effectively as when they were only available on paper. In some cases with older content the restrictions will be greater than they would have been with the paper version because the licence will have imposed new restrictions on material that has actually fallen out of copyright. This is particularly common with electronic collections of newspapers.

Even when the holding library of a particular item has been identified there can be further problems finding the precise content that is needed. Low use material such as back runs of foreign journals and specialist western journals and conference proceedings are often prime candidates for sending to off-site storage, freeing up prime space in the Library for users and more heavily used collections. This would not be such a problem if the contents of these journals were indexed in the standard tools such as Google scholar and the big disciplinary databases, but very often this is not the case, even if they are published in Europe or the US. Once they have been removed from the open shelves they can therefore become both unusable and unused, making their retention hard to justify. For detailed indexes of journals published outside the US and Europe it is usually necessary to use the specialist bibliographies produced by libraries in those countries. The range and currency of the content will vary according to the resources available to the national libraries and bibliographic agencies. Area studies librarians have made numerous attempts to deal with the problem of poor information about overseas and specialist publications over the years. In the Slavonic field libraries across Europe worked together to create the European Bibliography of Slavonic and East European Studies (EBSEES), which covered European academic writing on Eastern Europe, indexing journals and conference proceedings. With considerable effort from volunteers and institutional help from a number of libraries, including most recently the Berlin State Library, it succeeded in providing coverage of titles published between 1991 and 2007. It coexisted with the American equivalent, entitled ABSEES, but plans to merge the two could never be implemented because of the different transliteration systems used. ABSEES eventually became a subscription service while EBSEES remains available but frozen. More recently a new service has been set up called the Slavic Humanities Index (<http://slavus.ca/en/>), which indexes the content of periodical titles in the humanities from twelve East European countries. This started as a voluntary activity by one dedicated area specialist librarian based at the University of Toronto, but it too has now become a subscription service. Some specialist libraries are able to resource the creation and maintenance of this kind of service and make them available free of charge. One such example is the Africana Conference Paper Index, produced by library staff at the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University, which indexes grey literature which would be almost impossible to identify any other way. Guides such as this, whether available on subscription or free of charge, require huge and sustained effort if they are to be useful, but do provide a gateway to the contents of area studies collections that would otherwise be hidden from the research community.

## Classification and access

Are researchers able to identify specialist area studies collections when they visit academic libraries? Is the size and importance of the collection obvious or is even the most important collection on and from other countries hidden from view? In many cases these collections are scattered for reasons relating to library management. This is the case in the British Library not only because the collections of overseas material are on closed access, but also because they are managed by different departments of the Library. Monographs, maps, official publications, newspapers and archives might all be needed by a researcher working on the history of any particular country, and the holdings will be strong, but the systems for discovering them and for using them will be different and it might not be straightforward to use them alongside each other. In most other libraries it is the classification of the collection that causes the problem.

Traditionally there are three purposes to classification: to provide a meaningful arrangement of material on the open shelves by subject; to act as a system of call numbers providing a unique location for an item on a shelf; and to provide subject access within the catalogue. Classification as a means of subject searching is very rarely used now, as keywords and Library of Congress subject headings predominate. Being able to find an item on the shelf remains important for as long as there are print collections that are publicly accessible. Despite the declining importance of print collections in some disciplines it is not unusual for libraries to spend substantial sums reclassifying the collections, with the aim of using a standard scheme that can facilitate processing and shelf-ready acquisition, speeding up the time it takes for a book to be available to readers. The idiosyncratic home-grown classification scheme, purpose built for the collection it supports, has gone out of use in many libraries and often for good reasons. With a standard library collection comprising largely Anglo-American and West European books on the major disciplines ease of use is facilitated by using a standard scheme that will be familiar to most users.

Where classification becomes an issue for area studies, it is the question of providing a meaningful arrangement of material on the open shelves that reflects the nature of the collection. All standard classification schemes scatter these collections, distributing the books into the various disciplinary categories and making it impossible to see the collections as a coherent whole. They also have a clear Anglo-American and European bias, being much less hospitable to coverage of the rest of the world. LC and other schemes they have been criticised as "restrictive, inhospitable, unfair and biased" (Batoma, 2009). There are three distinct approaches to the problem used to varying degrees in different countries. Some libraries use a standard scheme, accepting any disadvantages; some take a standard scheme and adapt it so it better suits the needs of that library's users; and a few have created a new scheme from scratch.

Almost all academic libraries in the US use the Library of Congress scheme to classify their collections, and more and more libraries outside the US are starting to do the same. Given its origins it has a perfectly understandable emphasis on American studies, with two whole main classes given over to the subject. The study of other regions of the world is relegated to smaller sub-categories of disciplines and the level of detail is simply not as great as is needed in a specialist collection on another part of the world, or based in another part of the world. Books on the history of India will be in the history collection, those on Indian politics with other politics books, and so on; breaking up what can be highly significant if not unique collections into numerous parts physically separated from each other. Where this is unavoidable, in many large single university libraries arranged by the Library of Congress scheme, the only answer is to provide excellent web-based information for researchers describing in detail the strengths of the collection and how to locate material. Other universities have addressed the issue by setting up separate site libraries where material on a country or region can be assembled in one place. The particular scheme used to classify it is then no longer such a barrier, there can be knowledgeable staff on site to provide expert



help, and practical issues such as accurate shelving of material in foreign scripts are no longer such a problem. The library can also then play a role in the public profile of the university, serving as a physical manifestation of the strength of the global research carried out in the institution. In some cases, where there are extensive collections written in non-Roman scripts, it is only that part of the collection that is separated out and housed separately, leaving the English language material in the normal sequence. In one of the few articles that address the issue of classification for area studies collections, one librarian criticises this practice with good reason as being designed more for the convenience of library staff than the researcher (Hickey, 2006). Most researchers specialising in a country will appreciate having all the material on that country together, no matter what language it is in.

Outside the United States it is more common for area studies libraries to be classified by schemes designed for the purpose, with the primary division being by country or region and secondary divisions by subject. Possibly the only articles dedicated to the practice and principles of classification for area studies libraries, dating from the 1980s, looked at the schemes used in six specialist libraries in the UK and in South Africa (Dale, 1985). They were all non-standard. Some were entirely created in-house, and some took a standard scheme and adapted it so it could be used within a predominantly geographical sequence. All also needed to accommodate those parts of the collection that were purely disciplinary where the subject matter was not restricted by country or region. One of the examples chosen for the article was the School of Oriental and African Studies Library, part of the University of London. The scheme currently in use there uses a simplified version of the Dewey Decimal Classification, within main classes for each country or region. Alongside these geographical divisions general works on humanities and social science, law and art and archaeology are all classified and shelved by subject. In the case of India, above, this will bring together the books on politics, economics, history and any other disciplines and present the collection on India as a coherent whole, reflecting the care with which it has certainly been created. As with any purpose built scheme, one like this needs maintenance, and particular problems arise when country names or borders change. This can be a problem, as the Library can be seen as ill-informed if it does not recognise such changes reasonably quickly but it will normally want to wait until confident that the change is permanent, or as permanent as such a change ever is. To give just one example, in the last twenty five years libraries with specialist collections on Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have had to create new classes for the new countries. In both cases the collections will still contain much material that relates to the country as it was and this will still need to be accommodated, and so old terminology still has a place in the classification scheme. There is no right way to resolve this kind of problem, which also affects cataloguing standards. With that proviso, and recognising the practical constraints around changing classification schemes, the most successful approach for an area studies collection seems to be to impose geographical main classes on top of a suitably adapted standard scheme. Such an approach facilitates browsing by researchers, something which remains an important part of resource discovery when dealing with collections of books and other publications that can be hard to locate in a catalogue or database, for reasons dealt with below, and which might only be held in one or two libraries in the country.

### **Cataloguing and metadata**

Browsing does still have its place, but it is just one of many ways by which researchers identify relevant resources, only some of which can be influenced by the Library. Many senior researchers have excellent personal networks. They will attend conferences or peer review publications, getting access to research outputs before they are actually published. Resource discovery tools created by an academic library are an important part of the picture, but only part. One survey of researchers showed that 60% of respondents, especially in the arts and humanities, begin by using their institutional library catalogue, and 56% by using

Google Scholar (Research Information Network, 2009). Recent implementations of library catalogues have attempted to close the gap between library owned resources and the contents of subscription databases by including them all in one deceptively simple search interface, producing results from a much wider range of resources than was possible with a traditional online library catalogue. This has obvious advantages in that it opens up access to many more resources with a single search, but it also undermines the carefully developed standards that librarians have created and implemented over many years but which do not apply to externally managed systems. Researchers might well not realise that they are not seeing all the potential hits that they might, because of the wide range of different standards used in these systems. This will matter most not only with foreign language material, where transliteration standards might vary enormously, but potentially affects all overseas publications because of the way the names of people and of places are treated.

Cataloguing overseas publications always requires a degree of background knowledge that might not be readily available outside specialist libraries, and without it the pitfalls are many. Whatever cataloguing standard might officially be in use, information in the catalogue might be misleading or wrong if the context is not well understood. Personal names can be particularly problematic. The variety of forms for African names has been emphasized by one author who argues that standards and authority records should be created by African libraries, and that library schools should teach comparative cataloguing. It is hard to disagree, when he quotes the following description of African naming conventions from a 1993 article by Ann Bein:

"African personal names are as profuse, rich, and varied as African languages. They may contain simple or compound surnames, forenames, patronymics, honorifics; include indigenous, European, and / or Islamic elements, animal names, plant names, names of things, indicate caste, ethnic affiliation, place of origin, birth order, day or month of birth, genealogy; be entered under first element, last element, or sometimes in-between; or consist of one element or many" (Bein, cited in Batoma, 2009)

He also cites the instance of Zaire in 1972, when the President changed his name to Mobutu sese Seko and insisted that all Zairian citizens did the same in an "authenticity campaign". They later changed back to their original names, leaving a puzzle for future cataloguers.

There are numerous examples of famous names from across the world that are spelt in multiple different ways in English. The Nobel Prize winning novelist Naguib Mahfouz is sometimes Najīb Maḥfūz. The spelling of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has been challenging journalists for many years. Even European names can be difficult without the appropriate level of knowledge. To give just one example, Hungarian names are usually given in Hungary with the surname first. Sometimes they will be reversed to make it easier for a foreign audience, and it will then be difficult for a non expert cataloguer to know which way round it should be.

Names of places are equally troublesome, partly for political as well as cultural reasons, and the standards used by most libraries for describing them are set by the Library of Congress using the form of name set by the US Board on Geographic Names, a federal body. Countries which have existed for a brief period or not been internationally recognised might not have a heading of their own or the heading chosen might be controversial. Gretchen Walsh has highlighted the problem of Biafra, which existed from 1967 to 1970 but was never recognised and for which there is no heading. This affects subject headings as well as catalogue headings for official bodies (LaFond & Walsh, Gretchen, 2004). Former names of countries are not used, so Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia are no longer approved names. This causes a practical problem when cataloguing books that are about precisely those countries as they existed. One recent example of a decision currently under consideration is

that of Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014. It is not recognised by the US, UK or European governments as part of Russia, and at the time of writing it has been decided not to change the heading to recognise the annexation. The heading remains Crimea (Ukraine) in line with US foreign policy. It is not possible to choose a catalogue heading in these circumstances without taking a political stance.

In any library the level of expertise available to deal with the most complex foreign material might have varied over the years, and errors might become embedded in systems. In some cases standards are not adequate to deal with the most complex issues, or have not yet been agreed. While this gives an opportunity for library staff expert in working with overseas publications to influence the direction of those standards, it means that there will be inconsistency in today's library systems, despite the best efforts of all those concerned, and researchers will need to develop a high level of skill to discover all the material that is held in area studies collections. The cataloguing standards we are used to in the US and the UK are not used universally, and, like the standard classification systems discussed above, they have been criticised for a degree of Anglo-American bias. That is hardly surprising with the Anglo-American cataloguing rules, or AACR2, where the clue is in the name. One of the purposes of the move from AACR2 to RDA is make the standard more universal and less overtly Anglo-American, and specialist library groups have been closely involved in discussions about its implementation. The focus in RDA on using the original language in the original script is encouraging but comes with its own challenges, and on its own cannot solve the problems of legacy standards, lack of expertise for dealing with foreign names and subjects, and problems of transliteration.

Researchers should have good reason to expect the greatest degree of standardisation and consistency in library catalogues, when official standards have been used, but this is not always the case. Changing systems for dealing with foreign languages over time mean that multiple different standards may be in use for the names of people and of places and for searching by subject or title. This is especially true of the oldest and best research libraries with the strongest collections and the longest history. Different transliteration standards have been in use at different times and in different countries, and in fact transliteration was not so commonly used before online catalogues were implemented. This accounts for the guidance to British Library users searching for pre-1975 publications in Russian which explains that they need to use the old British Museum transliteration system for the author's name, while the title will appear in the original Cyrillic. If the author has published books both before and after 1975, the only way to find them all in the integrated catalogue is to search for both the British Museum and Library of Congress transliterations. Even browsing the catalogue using the indexes will not help with this problem as different versions of the same name might be very far apart, for example the common Russian surname Iakovlev is spelt thus in the new system, but in the old system will be filed under Y for Yakovlev. The web guidance provided by the British Library is not just helpful to researchers, but essential and many other specialist libraries could usefully emulate it.

Transliteration has been a part of our online catalogues for many years, but surprisingly, there can still be a lack of agreement on the correct approach, and this will cause variation in our systems and catalogues. The East Asian library community has been concerned since at least 1983 with the inconsistent use of the alif and apostrophe to represent the same letter in Japanese. Their professional body, CEAL, in discussion with OCLC about this problem, wrote the following recommendation in 2012:

"the East Asian library community should encourage efforts to make romanization in library catalogues uniform. An OCLC representative recently (1/2012) indicated by email that they intend to do just that, as soon as they can. They will first need a consensus from East Asian librarians on how to proceed. Similarly, administrators of local systems may be encouraged to move retrospective clean up projects for

Japanese romanization higher on their priority list once there is a clear standard."(Britt et al., 2012)

That indicates clearly that such tricky technical and linguistic problems can only be resolved through collaboration between the various stakeholders, including in this case the Library of Congress, OCLC, local systems staff and area studies librarians.

Area studies researchers will be used to seeing the evidence of differing standards and conflicts between our standards and our systems. The use of special characters in transliteration such as the ligature to link two characters that represent only one in the original language, has always had its own search and display problems in our library systems, and they have affected not only languages which we think of as using an entirely different script, such as Chinese or Russian. Many European languages that use diacritics, which after all is the case for most European languages, have required over the years users to use different display fonts to see them properly represented.

Authority control can help to bring together different versions of the same word, but those problems are likely to reappear when the record is exported into reference management software. It is still not usual to see even European personal names appearing with mysterious punctuation marks replacing the diacritics which should be there. This used to be commonplace in our catalogues, requiring our users to change the display font, and it is now appearing again in users' own systems. The current web guidance for Endnote, one of the leading reference management systems, says the following:

"When you import references containing words in foreign languages, you may find that accents are sometimes replaced by other symbols, for example the double acute accent used in Hungarian is replaced by a question mark."

Romanization becomes even more of an issue in modern resource discovery systems which deliver results from multiple different systems, some managed by the library and some external databases. Where authority control does not reach to these external services nothing can bring together the multiple different versions of names such as Tolstoy, to use the most common version of his name to be found in English language publications. In other parts of Europe he might be called Tolstoj, or Tolstoi or Tolstoï, or Tolstoï, and each version will find different results. The situation with Dostoevsky is notoriously more complicated. 16 different spellings of Dostoevsky have been found in JSTOR with no single satisfactory way of searching for them all (M. M. Brewer, 2009).

The increased use of Unicode in our library systems, followed by the move to RDA of an emphasis on the use of the original language, both have the potential to resolve some of these problems in the long term, but the task is enormous. Unicode is a work in progress, and many languages are not yet fully represented. This includes both historic scripts and modern languages. In the short term the move back to the original pre-digital practice of cataloguing in the original script runs the risk of creating yet another subset of the collection that is retrievable in a different way. Theoretically, if all records had been transliterated according to the full Library of Congress standard, it would be possible to automate the conversion back into the original script, but in practice this requires so much human intervention to deal with errors that it has not been widely attempted. Even if library catalogues were now able to make the move back to original script catalogues this would not solve the searching problems for users. Clearly they would need appropriate keyboards on computers in libraries as well as at home. For libraries dealing with many other different scripts this has to mean pop up keyboards being installed for multiple languages and scripts.

A 2010 survey targeted librarians and researchers in East Asian, South Asian, South East Asian, Middle Eastern, Hebraic, and Slavic studies, and asked about the use of original scripts in catalogues. The results highlighted multiple problems with transliteration and with

dependence on Library of Congress Subject Headings for subject searching. Lack of expert language skill from cataloguing staff was identified as a problem, as was lack of awareness by end users of transliteration standards, particularly when it came to personal and institutional names. One Slavic librarian was quoted as saying the following: "My suspicion is that good subject access to Slavic materials may be lacking because language expertise in cataloging is lacking." The survey also found "a significant level of dissatisfaction with the current controlled English subject heading system. " This was especially the case with subject access to material in Chinese, Japanese and Korean (the CJK languages), where LCSH were considered too general and incapable of expressing the full range of concepts expressed in the literature. Understandably, cataloguers would choose a term that they considered "close enough". It was noted that there was a practical need for both original script and transliterated versions for library staff purposes (El-Sherbini & Chen, 2011).

However library catalogues resolve these issues and enforce standards, those same standards do not apply to commercial databases, and apply even less to digital collections to be found across the web. Technical issues around dealing with language in library systems and databases are very complex and it is only possible to touch on the issues here that get in the way of successful resource discovery by users. A few years ago it would have been the case that any material not in a standard West European character set would have caused problems. This is not an issue that just affects the languages of distant continents. Many of our systems were originally designed to work with English, and they have had to adjust over the years to cope with material published in other languages. The situation has improved greatly in recent years with the development and take-up of Unicode as a universal standard but that does not mean that users will no longer face problems trying to discover essential resources in languages other than English. Problems with legacy data and legacy systems abound, and language itself does not stay still. In fact one Slavic librarian, writing about the research skills needed by Slavic scholars, points out that the problems have become more acute as researchers have moved away from library systems to keyword searching.

"In today's digital environment, potential library patrons are less likely to use subject headings or other controlled vocabulary created by librarians and more likely to utilize direct full-text keyword searching, in effect relying on natural language searching and search engine algorithms to discover relevant materials." (M. M. Brewer, 2009)

His solution is dedicated information skills training delivered by specialist staff to resolve a problem that can no longer be resolved technically. As researchers work increasingly with external digital services as well as those managed by the library it becomes impossible to control and manage their experience, and it seems that the best that can be done is to ensure that library staff with the appropriate expertise are involved in resource discovery, and apply that expertise to produce high quality guidance and training for researchers in need of multilingual and international publications.

## 7. Library support and services for area studies researchers

### **Abstract:**

This chapter brings together traditional and new ways in which libraries can help area studies researchers. It outlines the elements of an information skills programme aimed at meeting their specialist needs, and looks at ways in which library staff can help students studying abroad. It reviews the core services of academic libraries, considering how they can be made more international, and at how this can help libraries support their increasingly international user communities, and the institutions' increasingly interdisciplinary and international research programmes and strategies.

**Keywords:** research support, information skills, study abroad, services, systems, space, library ethnography, inter-library loan, copyright advice, international strategy.

As the previous chapters show, area studies researchers are faced with a complex and fast changing information landscape. Library services tend not to be designed with their interests in mind, being more likely to reflect the disciplinary structure of most universities; and library systems can create barriers to access that can test the skills of library staff as well as researchers. Without services and systems designed specifically to meet their needs many area studies researchers will struggle to find the material they need. The conventional answer is to design a dedicated information skills programme for them, although that can prove difficult to implement. This chapter argues that more is needed, both in terms of a better understanding of the research process in general, and of the specific demands of a user community with an international perspective. Broader benefits come from thinking internationally about all of the Library's services, systems and functions and ensuring that they are not designed around a default and implicit assumption that everyone is working in traditional disciplines with Anglo-American or West European materials. Done well, this can enhance services not just for the relatively small communities of area studies researchers in any institution, but also for the increasingly international user communities that nowadays characterize most universities.

Identifying the support needed by any group of researchers and then putting that support in place in such a way that it is both useful and used is notoriously difficult, for reasons that are the same across at least the humanities and social sciences, if not beyond. The skills and information-seeking habits of more senior researchers were often fixed at a relatively early stage in their career and they simply do not have an incentive to develop new skills, or to go looking for the support that their library can provide. Their research methods are well established and work for them, and their working practices then influence the research students they supervise and the research assistants they employ, if they are lucky enough to have research assistants. If they do wish to update their skills they can find it awkward to admit that they would like help. In addition many researchers have a limited view at best of how the Library can help them. Research carried out recently on behalf of OCLC at four US universities: Cornell, the Ohio State University, Vanderbilt and the University of Washington, shows that researchers are increasingly relying on network level search engines such as Google and Google Scholar, rather than library systems. Personal networks are as important to them as they have ever been as a means of current awareness. They are on the whole not interested in dealing with topics such as copyright or systems such as institutional repositories until they are obliged to be. Most depressingly for librarians, the researchers surveyed were unaware of the ways in which librarians could help, although they were aware of gaps in their knowledge around issues such as the management of the creation of consistent metadata. There is a clear potential here for services designed to solve specific practical problems, available at the time and in the way that researchers need them. As the report's authors point out: "academic libraries can support research by developing and aggregating discipline-based tools, providing customized services, and emphasizing user-centered services." (Kroll & Forsman, 2010). If you ignore the emphasis on discipline, as you so often have to do, this approach works equally for area studies, which has strong traditions of user-centred support.

It is often external factors that provide the impetus for change, but these are not always seen as positive. One difference between the UK and the US is that in the UK the influence of the successive research assessment exercises is very strong, and has set the agenda for research support within universities. The institutional obligations imposed by the REF have given many UK libraries the opportunity to lead on areas such as open Access, bibliometrics, research data management and copyright. New roles have been created and some libraries completely restructured to support this work alongside teaching and learning support. This gives library staff and services an enhanced profile in the university, especially at a senior administrative and management level. It is much less clear that this work is as yet perceived by the ordinary research community as helpful. Research assessment requirements are often seen as burdensome and bureaucratic and as taking up time that could be used for actually carrying out research. As a recent UK report put it: "institutionally-provided research support services are not appreciated by researchers in universities, who consider them marginal at best and burdensome at worst" [MacColl & Jubb, 2011]. The research assessment process itself is often unpopular and the association of the library with its processes can create barriers to a productive relationship between library staff and the academic community. Academic libraries tend to be perceived as unique in the university structure, being delicately poised between the administration and the academics. Becoming too closely associated with burdensome administrative processes can disrupt that balance.

What are the main ways in which academic libraries can help researchers in their daily work? Traditionally the list will always start with access to collections. Providing access to high quality collections, whether print, digital, or in other formats, can help generate research ideas and bring together a research community. This is especially true for area studies where serious research collections tend to be concentrated in a smaller number of institutions that act as magnets for researchers. Other ways include the following: study space (a serious issue for research postgraduates if not for academic staff), help with literature searching at the beginning of a project, help with research proposals, advice on evaluating sources, advice on accessing material in other libraries and archives, on reference management, on copyright and plagiarism, and on managing their research data. Towards the end of the research process library staff can advise on open access publishing and repositories, on contracts with publishers and on bibliometrics. Many of the above skills are included in generic training sessions for research postgraduates, with that training often delivered by librarians.

No single member of library staff, no matter how experienced, could be expected to cover all the above functions in detail, and this where the role of the specialist liaison librarian as a bridge between the researcher and the rest of the library infrastructure comes into its own. For that relationship to work well there has to be trust and mutual understanding built up between the research community and the librarian. In area studies productive relationships can often be developed as the result of the difficulties of acquiring research materials from abroad. The very obstacles that make this process difficult can generate productive partnerships between researchers and librarians both working towards the same goal and helping each other, whether with information about new publications and suppliers, or by librarians trusting researchers to buy relevant material for the Library while on study trips abroad. Librarians can also benefit enormously from developing a better understanding of the research process. A British book on providing effective library services for research ends with one simple recommendation: become a researcher. (Webb, Gannon-Leary, & Bent, 2007). In the UK carrying out research does not feature on the ever-growing list of tasks expected of librarians, whereas it is far more likely to be an integral part of the role in the US. That means that most British librarians never experience the systems and services that they provide in the same way that their users do. It can be a salutary experience, if not a shock, to hit a technical or administrative obstacle accessing a key resource when faced with a deadline. While it is impractical to expect all British librarians to take on extra obligations to

carry out research and to publish, the incorporation of short projects into everyday work that require professional reading and report writing not only help to keep skills up to date, but also give at least a flavour of what their users experience on a daily basis.

Understanding how researchers work has to be the key to providing high quality support services that are used and appreciated by the researchers they are intended for. Various methods have been used to try and do this, with varying degrees of success. Use of systems and information seeking behaviour can be monitored and analysed through logging accesses and following the pathways that users take through our systems, and this is a useful part of the picture, but only a part. The traditional way to find out what our users think has always been to survey them and collect statistical data, although often response rates are low and the evidence base for conclusions inadequate. Many library surveys fail to collect useful data simply because they are written from the perspective of the library rather than the user. They tend to ask about the systems and services that libraries provide and so they cannot begin to capture the much more complex and informal information networks that exist in academic communities. One interesting and potentially useful way of gathering qualitative data on the research process has recently been developed in the US and is beginning to be taken up in the UK as well, and that is the field of library ethnography, in which anthropological techniques such as observation and cognitive mapping are used to record the processes that researchers follow and the reasons they make the choices that they do. By looking at the whole research process rather than the part that is linked in the researcher's mind with the library a much more complete picture can be gained. This has the potential to help libraries design systems and services that are a much closer match to the real needs of researchers, rather than just those that they expect or understand to be the remit of libraries.

Over recent years there has been a risk that the Library's role in supporting the research process has been in danger of being seen by researchers as taking second place to the needs of taught students and the demands of research assessment imposed from outside. Getting the very practical elements of research support right and being seen to do so can help libraries prove their value within the institution. On a purely pragmatic level this has to be beneficial, particularly when it comes to making the case for funding to support subjects such as area studies which are usually in need of subsidy. Specialist library staff supporting area studies research are often highly skilled and are in a good position both to identify the needs of their research community and to represent those needs to those parts of the library that are unlikely to be aware of them, such as the systems or cataloguing teams. Where specialist area studies libraries exist they have many advantages, as they provide not only a dedicated communal space for researchers working on a particular region, but also staff at all levels with a degree of expertise and understanding that cannot be expected from the staff in a single centralised university library. Where such a facility does not exist it is even more important that good mechanisms exist for liaison between the subject support staff and the various library functional offices. Area studies researchers are best served by librarians who understand their working practices and information needs, design information skills programmes to suit those needs, and act as advocates on their behalf when systems and services are considered.

### **Information skills training**

Formal training in the skills needed for area studies research is normally much easier to put in place for postgraduate students than for other members of the research community. Funders might well have specific training requirements that institutions are obliged to provide. Some element of training is normally integrated into their official programmes, and this provides a captive, if not always enthusiastic, audience; something which is otherwise very hard for libraries to achieve. It is harder to reach other researchers, who might be lone scholars or small groups in disciplinary departments such as history, geography, political



science, economics or sociology, to name just a few possibilities. One of the challenges for librarians supporting area studies is to identify these scholars whatever their departmental affiliation and put some mechanisms in place to support them at every stage of their career, from junior researcher to experienced professor.

What are the core information skills that are needed in area studies research? At a broad level they fall into three main categories, the first two of which are common to all researchers but the third of which is distinct to area studies. As with any other research, a sound basis in generic information skills is essential. All researchers need to know how to find, evaluate and manage information, how to cite sources, how to avoid plagiarism and deal with copyright issues. They also need to understand the particular sources for their discipline, whether they are economic data, historical archives, literary texts or feature films, and they need to know how to work with appropriate tools to analyse those sources. Beyond these important skills, they will need specific regional and linguistic knowledge to apply those generic skills to research materials produced in their region or country of interest.

The history of area studies librarianship in the UK and the US has produced many examples of high quality and sophisticated bibliographic training, as it would traditionally have been called. At the University of Oxford, the work of J.S. G. Simmons, librarian of All Souls College, in teaching Slavonic bibliography to many generations of postgraduate students is legendary. Unfortunately the details of what became a sixteen-lecture course over two terms are not documented in detail, as Michael M. Brewer and Ernest A. Zitser record in their introduction to a special issue of *Slavic & East European Information Resources* dedicated to Slavic information literacy. Had they been, it would still be very unlikely that such a course could be replicated today. Finding a single timetabled slot in which to cover the basics of information skills can be a challenge in today's universities; finding sixteen such slots would probably be impossible. In a 2002 presentation for the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources Ellen Hammond, head of the East Asia Library at Yale University, set out her ideal programme for teaching Japanese bibliography and research methods over nine units. In addition to generic skills she includes the following country specific elements:

- what does it mean to study "Japan" in an American university?
- what is the scholarly apparatus for the study of Japan outside Japan?
- How are both scholarly and "popular" information produced in Japan?
- How is information organized and regulated in Japan?
- What are the strategies one could use for finding out the structure of a "field" (traditional or non-traditional discipline) of study in Japan?
- How can I do a subject search on a Japan-relevant topic in all languages? (Hammond, 2002)

Hammond's ideal structure clearly translates effortlessly to the study of any other country or region, but in truth very few institutions provide the time and the support necessary to allow an information skills programme for researchers to operate at that level of detail. This is particularly a problem for researchers who are in a university without an area studies centre or department. They will presumably receive whatever information skills is offered for their particular discipline or home department, but there are much less likely to be dedicated sessions to meet their specific needs, or library staff in post with the skills to deliver them.

Hammond also notes that half her students are American and half Japanese, which raises interesting questions about the level of existing knowledge that can be assumed, and the degree to which this knowledge can be shared through formal or informal means within communities of scholars. Establishing the base level of knowledge that can be assumed among area studies researchers is difficult. Most surveys of researcher knowledge and behaviour operate within discipline categories and while their conclusions might be relevant

in part they cannot be expected to capture the level of detail that is needed here. One attempt to survey students working on Latin America in the United States and Puerto Rico came up with some fairly depressing conclusions. Graduate student members of the Latin American Studies Association were asked about their knowledge of particular relevant sources. Perhaps not surprisingly, they demonstrated a good awareness of general tools such as Google Scholar, Wikipedia, JSTOR and of resources key to their discipline, but a lack of awareness of specialist and regionally published sources. This was accompanied by what the authors call “an inflated sense of competence with technology” which made them reluctant to take up skills training or ask for help at all. The consequences of this deficiency seem obvious in terms of the quality of the research they can produce, but these students presumably complete their programme of study successfully. That can only indicate that expectations of regional knowledge are limited at all academic levels and that researchers find their own way the best that they can if nothing better is offered them. When these students did take up the opportunity to develop their specialist skills they reported a higher level of confidence in their ability to carry out their research. The authors of this study point out that the field of Latin American studies is similar to that of other interdisciplinary fields, being characterized as “high-scatter”, with much less control and consolidation of resources than will be the case with most disciplines (Mazurkiewicz & Potts, 2007).

Bridging the gap between the skills researchers start out with and the endless possibilities potentially open to them and doing it within the hour or two normally available is a challenge that has exercised the minds of a number of specialist librarians. Despite a universal yearning for the more relaxed schedules of our predecessors most librarians now take a much more brutally pragmatic approach designed to squeeze some useful learning into whatever limited time they have. In the same issue of SEEIR on Slavic information literacy Ruth Wallach, a specialist art librarian from the University of Southern California, outlines the content of a one hour session based on addressing researchers’ immediate needs and the Information Literacy Competency Standards set by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in the United States. She focuses on English language sources, starting with Google and Wikipedia, recognising their inevitable place in everyone’s information landscape, and then follows a route from those to specialist databases and the library catalogue. This gives her the opportunity to describe the limitations of JSTOR and other Western databases for foreign publications. She also tries to instil a basic understanding of copyright issues, which she highlights as a vital element of modern information literacy.

Another Slavic studies librarian prioritises a different skill. Michael Brewer chooses to highlight the importance of understanding how the Russian language is transliterated in different ways in different systems. He describes this as a “hidden competency”, “everywhere assumed, but nowhere explicitly taught”. (M. M. Brewer, 2009) Without a basic awareness of the issues, researchers are simply going to miss much relevant material, making a literature search random at best. His examples show massive differences in search results depending on the form of transliteration used and the knowledge of sophisticated search techniques such as Boolean logic and truncation.

These examples show the benefits to be gained of bringing specific regional knowledge into the teaching of the more generic skills. It will be easier to do this if the researcher also has access to a discipline-specific training session from a subject librarian, and ideally if the two sessions are arranged with some degree of consultation. There could then be a possibility of building on the discipline-specific training with a session dedicated to the more esoteric skills needed for working with foreign publications. Researchers could come away with a basic awareness of the following:

- the location of relevant local print or other collections of foreign material.
- the geographic limitations of Western databases
- the most important resources from the country or region in question

- the way relevant foreign languages are treated in library catalogues, databases, and digital resources.
- issues around international copyright
- any censorship, past or present, that might limit the accuracy of foreign publications.
- How to get further expert help and where that help is located

In the limited time available for this kind of session it can only be possible to touch on the above and to make researchers aware both that there might be obstacles to accessing resources that they were not expecting, and, at least as important, that there is somebody on hand who can help when getting help becomes urgent. There are few more effective ways of providing the value of specialist librarians than when they can solve an immediate practical problem that has been wasting the time and hindering the progress of a researcher. Not everything can be answered in a training session, but if researchers go away recognising a friendly face with some useful expertise the door will be open for further interactions as and when they are needed and for a productive relationship between specialist librarian and scholar in future.

Providing support at the point in the research cycle when it is most needed is the key to having the greatest impact. Not every need can be met or question answered by an information skills session, and many services are only required at certain times in the research cycle. Most information skills sessions are scheduled towards the beginning of a research degree. This means they are well timed to help with literature searching and to provide initial familiarity with systems, but opportunities to help at later stages are often missed. Academic staff often receive a library induction when they are appointed, but it is rare for this to be repeated or supplemented later in their career. If librarians have good relations with their users they can take advantage of other opportunities to help, perhaps with preparing bids for research funding or preparing for a study trip abroad. Most researchers on an area studies programme will spend some time working in their country of interest, and here a good relationship with the library will produce numerous benefits. Specialist librarians can help prepare researchers for a field trip in several ways. It is a good time to ensure that they are really confident with accessing the Library's electronic resources from off-campus, and aware of any new resources that might have been made available since their initial induction. They can also be briefed on collections that they will find in the libraries that they will have the opportunity to visit. Where librarians have good personal contacts in libraries abroad they can help to make introductions, and to prepare less experienced researchers for any differences in the way libraries operate in other countries. The standard model of open access to the collections found in most UK and US libraries is not universal. Researchers might need letters of introduction to gain access to collections abroad and might still find their path blocked. Finally, specialist library staff can act as a constant point of contact even from a distance, helping with problems via email or social media.

One specific example of this kind of enhanced international support comes from Yale University. There the Head of the East Asia Library, Ellen Hammond, has described how her library had built on its traditional support for Asian studies to put formal mechanisms in place to improve support for Yale students studying in East Asia. The strategic context for this was the positioning of Yale as a "global university of consequence." That fed into the strategy of Yale University Library and provided the foundation for formal agreements to be signed with partner libraries in Tokyo, providing greater levels of support than had previously been possible. Supplementing these memoranda of understanding were refocused public services in the East Asia Library, with greater levels of personal support and documentation for students studying in Japan, and tailored skills sessions to prepare them in advance of their trip (Hammond, 2009).

When researchers become familiar with and appreciative of the expertise of their area studies librarians this can often lead to the chance to contribute actively to the preparation of research proposals. Many of the digital services created to support area studies research are examples of partnerships between librarians and researchers. Specialist knowledge of collections and tools can be invaluable, and the growth of the digital humanities provide great opportunities to demonstrate how traditional library skills around literature searching, metadata, copyright and digitisation can create new types of research resource. This can lead to new and productive partnerships between researchers and librarians, benefiting both parties and providing quantifiable proof to the institution of the value of the Library and its specialist librarians.

### **Designing core services for area studies researchers**

The information needs of area studies researchers are so complex and varied that no single member of library staff can be expected to be expert in all aspects, or to be always available. Ensuring that the Library is able to support research with an international focus involves equipping all staff with the basic tools. This should be part of an institutional culture that is focused on providing a suitable environment for all researchers in the institution, no matter how niche their specialism might appear to be. It is often the so-called niche areas that produce some of the most distinctive research in a university. Within a library service the key functions to be considered with this in mind are the basic ones: study space, enquiry services, inter-library loans, shelving and processing, cataloguing, library systems, and copyright advice.

A key part of the research environment is access to suitable and convenient study space. In this context the needs of area studies researchers are identical to those of others across the humanities and social sciences. Is the Library still a welcoming space for the researcher who needs a quiet space to work with printed and electronic materials available to them simultaneously, or has it gone so far in providing group study and catering that the researcher feels out of place and cannot find anywhere congenial to work? Is it simply so busy with undergraduates that there is no guarantee of a seat? This can be a particular problem for research students, who unlike academic staff will not have their own office, and unlike their colleagues in the sciences cannot claim a lab space. They can easily feel isolated if they can only study at home, and are unlikely to feel engaged with the library and its staff if their basic needs are not met. Just as importantly, they are less likely to feel part of the academic community. There are many ways in which libraries contribute to what we have learned to call the research environment, and helping to generate a feeling of scholarly community is one contribution that it would be a shame to lose. Here specialist area studies libraries have an enormous advantage, both because they bring together scholars in one place, and also because of the concentration of staff expertise in one place and at all levels. The balance of services between those are provided in a specialist site library and those provided by central functional departments will vary between institutions, but where key functions are not provided by staff with specialist skills it will be especially important to make sure that user needs are well represented at the centre.

At the most basic level, dealing with enquiries that need specialist language knowledge can be difficult in a general university library. Most staff will not be able to help users find a specific book in the shelf if it is written in Russian, Chinese, Arabic or Hebrew, unless it has a unique shelf mark. Similar difficulties apply to finding books and journal articles in the catalogue. It is extremely unlikely that non-specialist staff will be familiar with the particular problems of searching for foreign names, or with the idiosyncrasies of specialist resources whose interfaces as well as content are in a foreign language. We have seen that even qualified staff are unlikely to have been trained in these skills. In practice this means that there might be only person on the staff of most academic libraries who can help with these queries, and that person will almost certainly have acquired their expertise on the job. When that single member of staff is also supporting a whole range of other disciplines and

languages, as he or she so often is, that places quite a burden on the individual. If time allows, producing web-based guides to working with foreign resources can help supplement the limited support that will otherwise be available, and also provides material that researchers and librarians in other institutions can draw upon as needed. The communities of specialist librarians working on a particular region are usually very supportive, as they have needed to be, with a strong tradition of sharing information. Most specialist librarians' groups have active mailing lists, which are regularly used to help with difficult enquiries or to track down rare publications. A good professional network is vital for an area studies librarian, and ideally this should involve support for attendance of conferences and professional events where personal contacts can be made and experience shared. This is especially helpful for those staff who find themselves having to work in a language they are not very familiar with, as happens more and more often.

The basic behind the scenes functions of any library can become more difficult at every level when there is a significant amount of overseas material to process, and expectations of service level and speed might need to be reassessed. Will shelvees be able to shelve books in foreign scripts? The chapter on resource discovery has highlighted potential problems if cataloguers do not have the language skills to find the right record on a bibliographic database, or to catalogue from scratch if there is no record available. Is there a risk that this harder material might be left to one side and not dealt with as promptly as the easy Anglo-American books, thus providing a poorer service to this category of library user? When researcher numbers are seen as small and meeting those needs difficult there is always a danger that they will both expect and get a poorer quality of service.

Previous chapters have shown that the most common problems experienced by researchers carrying out literature searches are likely to relate to problems with foreign language material, particularly if it is not based a standard West European script. It is a commonplace nowadays that Library systems for handling data, digitised text and images should all in principle be able to support all the languages of the world, now that Unicode is the international standard. In practice problems abound, and it will come down to the area studies librarian to represent the interests of the research community when new systems are being implemented, and to ensure that help screens and documentation cater for the interests of all users, with relevant examples of search techniques.

One area where long delays are a regular and unavoidable feature beyond the control of the home library is the supply of inter-library loans from abroad. Linguistic skills are essential here in checking the reference and locating a possible source, and success will depend on good communication between the staff working in the inter-library loan office and the specialist librarian. Even when that works well it is hard to predict the arrival time of a publication from another country or another continent. Most researchers dependent on such material learn quickly that they have to factor in long waiting periods, sometimes of many months, before their inter-library loan arrives. The rise of digital publications and digital document delivery might have improved the turn-around time for many requests dealt with by ILL staff, but there remains a small but constant stream of requests for overseas publications that will take a disproportionate amount of time and effort to process.

Advising on copyright is always a difficult area, and it often falls to librarians to deal with such questions. When international copyright is involved it becomes much more difficult. Researchers might want advice on reproducing material published abroad or using it in their teaching, and it is likely that there is no other local source of expertise that can help, beyond the specialist librarian, apart from expensive legal advice. Can they digitise a photograph taken in the Middle East in the 1970s? Can they include it in a book they are writing, or include it in their website? If they need permission how can they get it? Are there any sources for identifying copyright holders abroad and contacting them? If something is out of copyright in its country of origin, is that necessarily the case elsewhere? If there is doubt over the copyright status of a document, will the Library be prepared to make it available and

under what conditions? Once the Library moves into supporting the entire process of scholarly communication, things become even more complicated. Who can advise on the wording of a contract with a foreign publisher, in a foreign language? Will it allow for the deposit of the text in an open access repository? What are the issues around research data around living subjects collected abroad? Are staff in the relevant departments equipped to answer these questions, or know who else can advise?

Often staff faced with copyright questions such as those above put a great deal of time and effort into becoming familiar with the law in another country, but this is fraught with hazard. It is a classic area where a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. They can easily come to believe that it is the law of the country in question that applies, when in fact they are obliged to operate under the law of the country they are in. That can lead to odd situations where an item can be out of copyright in the country in which it was published, but still in copyright in the UK or the US. To be most helpful with this kind of question, area studies librarians need a good knowledge of the copyright law of their own country, an understanding of whether the country in question has signed up to relevant international copyright treaties, and good information retrieval skills to enable them to track down dates of death and other information useful in establishing the copyright status of an item.

It would not be unreasonable for any busy academic library to doubt how far it is necessary to consider all the issues identified above and adapt their services accordingly. There are numerous competing demands on staff and on funds, and difficult decisions always have to be made about priorities. After all, area studies research has always been a minority interest and is likely to remain so. In that context it is worth looking at the bigger picture. Most Western universities are increasingly international communities, both in terms of academic staff and students. Recent figures from the Higher Education Statistical Agency in the UK demonstrate this. They show that in 2012/13 18% of all student enrolments at higher education institutions were from outside the UK. 5% were from other EU countries, and the remainder were from countries outside the EU. (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.). Universities UK report that the percentage of postgraduate taught students from outside the EU rose from 19.2% to 28.2% between 2003-4 and 2011-12 (Universities UK, 2013). Overseas students pay substantial fees and are a vital part of the financial health of any university. Many universities are developing international strategies to position themselves in an increasingly globalised knowledge economy, and they also become ever more vigilant in measuring student satisfaction. Where there is international research in a university supported by skilled library staff there is a resource that can be used to enhance the experience of the international user community as a whole.

Apart from the increasing internationalisation of higher education the other relevant factor that has the potential to change the way library services are provided is the growth of interdisciplinary research. This is increasingly the model for the most ground breaking modern research, and area studies is one of the best established examples with the longest history. The structural and systematic changes that are needed in libraries to support high quality area studies research that transcends disciplinary boundaries can be used as a model for supporting interdisciplinary research as a whole. In an article on advocating the role of librarians as interdisciplinary facilitators, the following plea for change across the profession is made:

Interdisciplinary research is merely a microcosm of the many changes that are occurring in information services and in academia at large. Librarians can take their profession in many different directions: they can change the layout and arrangement of library buildings; they can change the way information sources are described and cataloged; they can change what materials they buy; and they can change the very nature of the services they offer. (Knapp, 2012)

More focus on the researcher and a better understanding of the research process by academic librarians, whatever the subject matter they are supporting, cannot help but improve the quality of the service and put us in a better position to meet the needs of an increasingly global and interconnected research community working across disciplinary boundaries.

## Conclusion

When I began to write this book I thought it would be primarily concerned with the changing agenda for research support in academic libraries, with its focus on the digital and new directions in scholarly communication such as open access. I wanted to explore the impact of such changes on the way libraries and librarians supported the rather esoteric world of area studies in our universities, a world that I felt was poorly understood, and which I knew best through the lens of Russian and East European studies in the United Kingdom. The daily challenges of my working life were concerned with trying to ensure that a small and specialised group of researchers with very varied and complex needs had those needs met within a structure much more used to working within the traditional disciplines from an Anglo-American, European, or broadly “Western” point of view. That often led to misunderstandings which were clearly being echoed in universities across the country. It was only as I started to think more broadly about the way university research in what we used to call the “West” interacts with the rest of the world, whether that lies to the east of us or to the south, that I realised there were much bigger and more interesting issues to consider and that my focus had been too narrow. As I looked more closely at the work being done by fellow librarians supporting research on Africa, Asia or Latin America I realised that the benefits of a more global approach underlying all our activities went well beyond supporting any particular group of researchers, no matter how dear to my heart they might be.

Throughout my career I have been privileged to work in institutions with explicitly international research interests. In recent years I have been particularly lucky to be working for UCL, a university which is in the process of broadening and redefining its international strategy and has been leading the way for some years in inter- and multi-disciplinary research programmes designed to address global challenges. Within that context area studies researchers are ideally placed to contribute their specialist skills and understanding of other parts of the world alongside colleagues from more traditional disciplinary backgrounds and from research areas in international and global studies which were previously considered separately. For that reason it has been hard in this book and ultimately not profitable to try and distinguish between area studies and international or global studies. For the record, international studies have tended to be focused on international relations, although it does include regional studies, and global studies on global problems such as terrorism. Instead my focus has been on the issues raised by the need to support research which crosses international boundaries and relies on resources published in other countries and often in other languages. As more and more universities broaden the scope of their research programmes to address global challenges it has not been clear how far academic libraries have been able to adapt their structures, systems and services to reflect the new needs that are thrown up by this change in strategic direction. In some ways it echoes the earlier move to inter-disciplinarity which has been identified in the literature as a significant challenge for academic libraries, but it adds another dimension to the problem which has made it even more complex.

Most academic librarians have of course been through the university system themselves, and will have come into the profession with a degree in one of the major disciplines (often in the humanities, which can cause its own issues for research support in the sciences, but that is not for this book.) It is once they start their professional training to become librarians that there is an opportunity to address some of the challenges for libraries in supporting truly

global research, but it is clear that this is an opportunity that is usually being missed. Twenty or thirty years ago library school students would often have had the chance to specialise in support for a particular branch of area studies, but that has now almost entirely gone. Instead, librarians are being trained to take on the more specialist and functional roles that now dominate academic librarianship as it grapples with the much more technical tasks thrown up by the explosion in electronic publishing. That process was inevitable and necessary, but it is a shame that the break down in international barriers that are part of the global information age has not been accompanied by more explicit training in the publishing practices of other parts of the world and the needs of researchers working across borders. As we work in a much more complex and inter-related information society, it is vital that our thinking around how information is created, disseminated and used does not remain parochial, as that will ultimately stand in the way of true global research within our institutions.

One particularly difficult topic that has featured in a number of chapters has been the question of how we ensure that we as professional librarians maintain an ethical approach in our dealings with other countries. It arises with the research itself, which has largely moved away from a position where it was “us” studying “them”, to something much more collaborative and productive, following numerous critiques of area studies in the academic literature. The library literature addresses this question from time to time, but not comprehensively. It appears most often in discussion of digitization, where it is informed by the debates in the museum sector and the wider public about cultural property. It comes up much less often in discussions of acquisition, where it is relatively unusual to see the question raised. More broadly, it is part of the context in terms of the access to research resources that the international research community has, and how far we can ensure that our practices open up research to as many people as possible rather than excluding those who do not have the money or the technology to benefit. This last is a much larger and more difficult question, but area studies librarians will often find themselves facing it as they investigate new ways of creating and curating digital resources for the widest possible audience. This is an area where a great deal more work needs to be done.

Why it is so important to get our approach right? There are huge opportunities for specialist librarians, with their understanding of digital systems, to work with researchers to improve the flow of information and the understanding of the rest of the world. At the beginning of this book I quoted from the document that set out the framework for the REF assessment of research in the UK. It attempted a definition, or at least a description, of area studies, which I used to set the scene for the book. As it has taken me rather a long time to write this book, the REF process has now finished, and the final report makes a plea for the future of area studies research:

In sum, REF2014 demonstrates that Area Studies as a whole plays a crucial part in projecting the reputation of UK research around the globe, and in keeping the public as well as policy makers informed about and capable of influencing political, cultural, historical, economic and social debates in and beyond the UK... The quality and depth of this understanding must be considered in relation to complex, taxing and often unforeseen challenges around the globe. The Sub-panel strongly recommends that this research capacity be safeguarded and enhanced. (REF 2014, 2015)

Only a month later, the House of Lords in the UK produced a report which said that we were losing our analytical capacity to understand Russia in the context of the war being fought in Ukraine, as both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK and the European Union were losing their specialists. The cost of this was made clear. The home of this kind of specialised knowledge is our universities, and it is the role of libraries to ensure that our specialist researchers can do their work without being hindered. Librarians are driven by a commitment to their work and to the values of their profession, and the benefits should be obvious, but at the moment the structures and support are rarely in place to make our work



truly international. Developing such systems would mean not only that area studies researchers are better supported, but that we are much better placed to support the international strategies of our institutions and help them produce truly global research that addresses global problems. Making that transition could be the next great challenge for academic librarians.

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## **Appendix**

### **List of useful organizations for area studies librarians**

The following organizations are among the largest professional groups for librarians working with area studies collections. They are based mainly in the US and the UK, but much of the information they provide is open to anyone interested. They run mailing lists, hold conferences, publish journals and newsletters, and provide invaluable networks of expertise. The organizations listed here are concerned with regions of the world rather than individual countries; there are many more that focus on particular countries, but the larger regional organizations are a good starting point.

#### **AAMES**

Asian, African and Middle Eastern Section, Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association..  
Website: <https://aamesacrl.wordpress.com/>

#### **ACLAIIR**

Advisory Council on Latin American and Iberian Information Resources  
Website: <http://aclaiir.org.uk/>

#### **ALC**

The Africana Librarians Council  
A coordinate organization of the African Studies Association.  
<http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/africa/ALC/>

#### **CEAL**

The Council on East Asian Libraries  
The organization for East Asian librarians in North America  
website: <http://www.eastasianlib.org/>

#### **CLIR**

Committee on Libraries and Information Resources of ASEES (the Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies)  
Website: <http://intranet.library.arizona.edu/users/brewerm/bd/index.html>

#### **CONSALD**

The Committee on South Asian Libraries and Documentation (a committee of the South Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies)  
website: <http://www.consald.org/>

#### **CORMOSEA**

The Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (a committee of the Southeast Asia Council (SEAC) of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS).  
Website: <http://www.cormosea.org>

#### **COSEELIS**

Council for Slavonic and East European Library and Information Services  
Website: <https://coseelis.wordpress.com/>

#### **MELA**

Middle East Librarians' Association  
[www.mela.org](http://www.mela.org)



**Melcom International**

The European Association of Middle East Librarians  
website: <http://www.melcominternational.org/>

**MELCOM (UK)**

Middle East Libraries Committee,  
Website: <http://www.melcom.org.uk/>

**NACIRA**

National Committee for Information Resources on Asia  
Website: <http://nacira.org.uk/>

**SALALM**

Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials  
Website: <http://salalm.org/>

**SALG**

The South Asia Archive & Library Group  
Website: <http://saalg.blogspot.co.uk/>

**SCOLMA**

The UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa  
Website: <http://scolma.org/>

**SEES**

The Slavic and East European Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries,  
a division of the American Library Association.  
Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/seesliborg/>

**WESLINE**

West European Studies Library and Information Network  
Website: <http://wesline.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk/>

**WESS**

Western European Studies Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, a  
division of the American Library Association.  
Website: [http://wessweb.info/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://wessweb.info/index.php/Main_Page)