Chapter 6
Western Europe

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Libraries and the book chain

In the book chain, libraries have usually played a rather self-contained role. As non-profit agents, libraries were cut off from the book's economic life, which took the book to the reader via the publisher and the bookseller. With the take-off of the electronic publishing market, they are moving towards full integration in the book chain, where they are now likely to play an economic role.

A rough indication of the relevance of libraries as an economic player in the book chain may be illustrated by the relationship between the turnover of the national publishing industry and the size of library acquisitions in the European Union. Table 1 gives the gross income of the publishing industry in twelve European Union countries, and the corresponding public library acquisitions expenditures per inhabitant (only public libraries have been considered because they are the most important pur-

Table 1. Publishing incomes and library acquisitions in European Union countries, in French francs

Country	Publishing gross income per inhabitant[1]	Library acquisitions per inhabitant[2]	
		Public libraries	All libraries
Germany	630	0.85	3.68
Luxembourg	382	1.80	4.98
France	367	0.85	2.86
Spain	366	0.42	1.85
Denmark	350	12.35	15.47
United Kingdom	316	3.10	6.71
Netherlands	306	5.27	8.21
Italy	249	1.54 [3]	2.12 [3]
Belgium	221	2.89	5.40
Ireland	158	1.20	2.64
Greece	145	0.83 [3]	3.37 [3]
Portugal	117	0.04	0.73

1. Data for 1989.
2. 1986–90 average.
3. Estimated figures.

chasers of national literature) and total library acquisition expenditure per inhabitant. Data are drawn from an inquiry made by a consulting agency, BIPE Conseil, in 1989 (Ancillani, 1992), and library statistics (1986–90) issued by the European Commission (European Commission, 1995). These figures give a rough comparative vision of readership in the European Union, from an economic point of view. Table 2 shows the ratio of public library acquisitions to book industry gross income per 1,000 inhabitants. It is easy to see that countries are listed in a different order from Table 1.

Table 2. Ratio of public library acquisitions to publishing gross income (per 1,000 inhabitants) in European Union countries

Country	Ratio
Denmark	35
Netherlands	17
Belgium	13
United Kingdom	9
Ireland	7
Italy (estimated)	6
Greece (estimated)	5
Luxembourg	4
France	2
Germany	1
Spain	1
Portugal	0.3

It would be a mistake to draw firm conclusions from such library statistics, which do not take into account book exports (relevant especially in the British, Spanish and French cases) and acquisitions made by academic libraries. What is unquestionable, however, is that reading practices vary greatly in Europe and that they are independent of economic indicators (such as Gross Domestic Product). They are, instead, very much subject to national library policies as an essential ingredient of national book policies. The generous budgets allocated for library acquisitions in Denmark (and more generally in all Scandinavian countries) are essential to maintain high-level reading practices and a quality book industry, and to maintain high rates of literacy.

Libraries and the information chain

It is even more difficult to assess the role of libraries within the information chain, especially because there is no clear understanding of what an information chain is. Traditionally, the information services industry has been seen as information services and, to a lesser extent, the processors of such services. In this narrow sense, libraries may be counted among the most relevant information providers.

The rapid expansion of the information market, and the expectations linked with the growth in demand for electronic information and entertainment, are now broadening the scope of the information chain by including providers of information content, such as publishing and other media industries, and the main actors in information delivery and processing, such as producers and distributors of hardware, software and communication equipment. This fact, known as the 'convergence phenomenon', has blurred distinctions between the main actors and created an all-embracing concept of the information industry (see Chapters 21 and 23).

In such a context, what is the incidence of library and information services and how can their economic value be assessed? According to the European Union library macrostatistics, fees and charges placed by the libraries on their own services are estimated to be some 209 million ecus per year. This figure refers to the period 1986–90, at constant 1990 prices (European Commission, 1995). More than 10% of the income (21 million ecus in 1991–92, 26 million ecus in 1993–94) is represented by the receipts of the British Library Document Supply Service, by far the largest library document supplier in Europe (British Library, 1992, 1994).

It is important to note that such figures relate to both electronic (or partially electronic) and non-electronic information services. For the same period (1990), the electronic information services industry in the European Union was estimated at 3.1 billion ecus (it had developed to 3.6 billion ecus in 1992). This was at the time when the 'convergence phenomenon' had not yet started and the Internet was still a merely academic adventure. Today, it is practically impossible to give any statistical evidence and it is fairly risky to predict what the future of libraries will look like within the information chain.

Libraries in Western Europe: general statistics

According to the statistics issued by the European Commission, macrostatistics related to libraries in the European Union and other EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries can be summarized as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

On a historical basis (from 1981 to 1990) some macrostatistic trends in library activities and finances can be detected. The first, most straightforward conclusion is that while there have been no dramatic upheavals during the decade, a marked change has occurred in the relative focus of libraries' investments, the main area of investment growth now being devoted to the higher-education sector. Many indicators confirm this.

Library expenditure grew annually on average by 1.9% in the European Union countries and by 2.8% in the EFTA countries. But for higher-education libraries the rate of increase was, respectively, 2.7% and 3.5%. Comparatively, public library expenditure grew at a lower rate (respectively 2.2% and 2.6%). Most coherently, the average annual number of staff employed in higher-education libraries – 37,798 employees in the European Union – grew at a higher level than in other sectors (1.8% per year in comparison to an overall growth of 0.5%). As a consequence, staffing costs increased by

2.4% per annum (in relation to an annual average rate of increase equal to 1.7%). Comparatively, public libraries in the twelve members of the European Union in that period experienced a slight reduction in staff (from 118,399 to 118,218). Also, the rate of increase in book stocks was higher in university libraries and corresponded in 1986–90 to 2.6% per annum; in total 283.4 million books were held (20.3% of the overall book stocks). In the other library sectors, the growth rate is considerably lower, ranging from 1.3% in national libraries to 1.9% in public libraries.

Table 3. Libraries in the European Union, 1981–90

	Average 1986–90	Average 1981–85
Libraries	95 880	88 461
Yearly library expenditure (millions of ecus)[1]	6 637	6 036
Yearly expenditure per head (ecus)[1]	19.52	17.85
% of GDP	0.15	0.15
Staff employed	237 227	231 565
Library collections (millions)	1 396	1 272
Consultations per inhabitant	8.161	8.132

1. Constant 1990 prices.

Table 4. Libraries in non–European Union EFTA countries (including Austria, Finland and Sweden), 1981–90

	Average 1986–90	Average 1981–85
Libraries	27 917	30 097
Yearly library expenditure (millions of ecus)[1]	1 515	1 419
Yearly expenditure per head (ecus)[1]	47.09	44.17
% of GDP	0.23	0.24
Staff employed	43 035	42 724
Library collections (millions)	316	295
Consultations per inhabitant	8.682	8.464

1. Constant 1990 prices.

The second conclusion concerns the unrelenting decline of school libraries, which mirrors the reduction in pupil numbers and the ageing of the population. All indicators confirm such a trend. From 1981–85 to 1986–90, library expenditure for school libraries grew by only 0.3% per year; as a percentage of the overall European book stocks, their holdings decreased from 22.6% in the first quinquennium to 20% in the second. Personnel remained steady through the decade and the annual average number of consultations decreased by 0.1% from the first to the second quinquennium. Even more eloquent is the figure concerning school library expenditure as a part of overall library expenditure, which was 17.9% in 1981–85 but fell to 14.1% in the second quinquennium (in the EFTA area the decrease is even more dramatic: from 21.1% to 16.8%).

Finally, different rates of increase between library staff (on average, 0.5% per annum) and book stocks (on average, 1.9% per annum) may suggest an increase in the efficiency of library staff. This is certainly to be ascribed to the automation of library services, which has entailed revolutionary changes and enhancements in the provision of library services and their organization.

The changing role of national libraries

In order to keep up with the great expectations laid today on national libraries, the budgets allocated to them have been proportionally increased. In 1981–85 the annual average expenditure of European national libraries was equivalent to 401.2 million ecus (expressed at 1990 constant prices), which represented 5.7% of the total budget allocated to libraries; during the years 1986–90 expenditure grew by 0.9% per year and reached 423.6 million ecus (European Commission, 1995). More than 50% of such expenditure is allocated to staff salaries, which total around 240.8 million ecus per annum. It is worth noting that, like many other libraries, national libraries are developing forms of self-financing. The production of bibliographic services, once considered as a duty, has become a key aspect of the library industry with a strong commercial component: in the United Kingdom, for instance, receipts for national bibliographies reached £2,412,300 in 1991–92 and slightly declined to £2,123,000 in 1993–94 (British Library, 1992, 1994). This considerable figure does not take into account incomes related to online records captured by other libraries.

In spite of budget increases, national libraries play a less dominant role within national library systems. The decline of the centralistic role of the national library within a national library system is apparent. In the 1970s and 1980s such a role was emphasized in professional literature and UNESCO documents: it seemed that national libraries could (and should) cumulate many functions, from legal deposit to the provision of national bibliographic services, from the extensive collection of foreign material to interlibrary loan, from national planning to research and development (Sylvestre, 1987). No national library today would subscribe to such a large range of tasks. Even well-established organizations, like the British Library or the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, are now starting to involve in their work other research libraries and to share the provision of library services, thus showing that there are alternative means of fulfilling information needs at a national level (Line, 1989).

Looking at national library budgets, the case for shared functions seems even more justified. The top four national libraries in Western Europe are the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Deutsche Bibliothek and the 'system' of national libraries of Florence and Rome. The annual average budget, however, tops 100 million ecus only in the United Kingdom and is between 10 and 20 million ecus in a large number of West European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden). This is why the

range of tasks assigned to national libraries is reduced in many cases merely to collecting, maintaining and circulating legal deposit publications, and to providing national bibliographic services. Moreover, the widespread diffusion of the Internet is democratizing access to information and abolishing more or less hierarchical levels among libraries.

The possibility of acting as a 'clearing house' for requests concerning national information resources may also give national libraries a pivotal role within national library systems: by concentrating on a more restricted set of functions and by co-ordinating national plans to access information, national libraries are expected to play again a dominant role in the new electronic environment.

Public libraries

According to European Commission statistics (1995), expenditure on public libraries in Europe increased from some 2,812 million ecus in 1981 to 3,338 million ecus in 1990, where both figures are expressed at 1990 constant prices. The annual average increase represents, therefore, 1.9% over the decade. Some 58% of public library expenditure was spent on staff and 17.9% on acquisitions. It is important to note that while the public library sector represented 49.5% of total library expenditure from 1981 to 1985, this percentage is lower from 1986 to 1990 (48.2%). The number of service points increased during the 1980s by 2.6%, which brings the average population per service point to 3,550. Only Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries are below this average.

From one quinquennium to another, the average expenditure on acquisitions increased by 2.2% yearly and represented an annual expenditure of 592 million ecus in 1986–90. Big efforts in collection development are being made by the United Kingdom and Germany (each spending more than 100 million ecus per year), the Netherlands (51,442,601 ecus), France (46,640,429 ecus), Sweden (55,047,146), Finland (48,287,196) and Denmark (42,565,288).

The average number of library consultations in the public library sector was estimated to be 1,819,866 million yearly in 1986–90 for the European Union libraries, and 197,730 million for EFTA countries. In relation to the public they serve, library consultations are 5,351 per thousand population yearly in European Union public libraries and 6,145 in EFTA countries. Reading habits, therefore, seem to reflect the historical divide which has for centuries characterized literacy and cultural practices in Northern and Southern Europe. Just as in the eighteenth century, northern regions seem to have far higher levels of literacy than southern regions. The percentage of the population registered with public libraries is as high as 65% in Denmark and 58% in the United Kingdom, but smaller percentages are found in the Netherlands (30%), Ireland (19.5%), France (17%) and Germany (between 10 and 15%) (Poulain, 1992).

In Western Europe, legislation for public libraries is very much linked with the general characteristics of the administrative law system in force in the country. In general, two different models can be detected: the 'continental' model, which is usually based on a general framework that makes provisions for local library systems, and the Anglo-Saxon model, where duties of the local bodies or 'authorities' are determined by specific 'Acts'. Within the continental model, we must distinguish between federal and regional legislation on libraries, and the unitary states where the legislation is centralized.

Negative trends and stagnation are commonplace themes for public library budgets in Europe, but certainly not for library activities. In order to cope with declining reading habits, stocks of talking books and audiovisual materials, whose consultation is almost double that of traditional books, have been reinforced. The list of public libraries providing access to the Internet is also growing larger every

day. Especially in Northern European countries, special services are now being provided, such as reference services, business information, user-tailored information and community information. Such diversification of both library stocks and services has raised the issue of free access to information. For years, free services have been considered one of the basic tenets for librarians. After animated discussions on this topic, the revised UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto (see box, pp. 90-91) makes a distinction between basic services, which should be free of charge, and added-value services, for which libraries should be enabled to cover their working costs (Gattégno, 1994).

Even before this change was accepted, librarians seem to have adopted a pragmatic attitude, keeping principles on one side and using them only for theoretical debates. According to the statistics provided by the European Commission, fees and charges as a proportion of total library incomes have increased slightly from an average of 2.99% for the quinquennium 1981–85 to 3.16% for the quinquennium 1986–90. But in the public library sector, they grew from some 90 million ecus in 1981 to 110 million ecus in 1990, where both figures are expressed at 1990 constant prices. This represents an annual average increase of 3.6%.

Champions of a market philosophy would find even more arguments if their observations were limited to only a few countries. In the Netherlands, fees and charges represent 9.6% of total expenditure for libraries; they have increased, however, by 31% from the quinquennium 1981–85 to 1986–90. And in spite of a 'weak' increase by 19% from 1981–85 to 1986–90, fees and charges in Belgium now total 10% of the global library income. In the United Kingdom data are more controversial: here, too, fees and charges increased by 19% from the first to the second quinquennium, but self-financing incomes reached only 2% of the overall library expenditure.

Academic libraries

The number of universities – and, as a consequence, academic libraries – has grown tremendously in recent years. Service points as a whole have increased all over the European Union. They added up to 4,421 in 1981–85, and to 4,874 five years later (for EFTA countries, the figures are, respectively, 1,308 and 1,361). At the same time, the budget allocated to academic libraries increased from an annual average of 946 million in 1981–85 to 1,079 million in 1986–90 (225 million to 265 million for EFTA countries) (European Commission, 1995). It is noteworthy that expenditure on academic libraries as a percentage of overall library expenditure has globally expanded: it went from 13.3% for the first quinquennium to 16.9% in the second (the phenomenon is less marked in EFTA countries where percentages are, respectively, 15.9% and 17.5%). For the European Union, staff numbers increased by 9% in five years (from 34,544 to 37,798; and from 3,803 to 4,246 in EFTA). Whereas university library acquisitions represented in 1986–90 20% of total library acquisitions, expenditure on them has grown from 14.5% of total expenditure in 1981–85 to 31.6% in 1986–90. In practice, expenditure for university library acquisitions has almost doubled in five years, whereas acquisitions in terms of volume remain steady.

Disparities among European countries are quite striking. While Germany and the United Kingdom allocate, on average, respectively 385 million and 275 million ecus per year for their university libraries, among the remaining countries only in France and the Netherlands does the budget go over 100 million ecus per year. In the other European states it is generally well below 60 million ecus. Library consultations also vary greatly in the European countries. Their annual average number is over 30 million only in the United Kingdom and Germany, whereas it is below 10 million in countries with a relatively large population of higher-

UNESCO–IFLA Public Library Manifesto, 1994

Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and of individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.

The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.

This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.

UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries.

The public library

The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users.

The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison.

All age-groups must find material relevant to their needs. Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials. High quality and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental.

Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavour and imagination.

Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressures.

Missions of the public library

The following key missions which relate to information, literacy, education and culture should be at the core of public library services:

1. Creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age.
2. Supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels.
3. Providing opportunities for personal creative development.
4. Stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people.
5. Promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations.
6. Providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts.
7. Fostering intercultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity.
8. Supporting the oral tradition.

9. Ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information.
10. Providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups.
11. Facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills.
12. Supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age-groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.

Funding, legislation and networks

- The public library shall in principle be free of charge. The public library is the responsibility of local and national authorities. It must be supported by specific legislation and financed by national and local governments. It has to be an essential component of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacy and education.

- To ensure nationwide library co-ordination and co-operation, legislation and strategic plans must also define and promote a national library network based on agreed standards of service.

- The public library network must be designed in relation to national, regional, research and special libraries as well as libraries in schools, colleges and universities.

Operation and management

- A clear policy must be formulated, defining objectives, priorities and services in relation to the local community needs. The public library has to be organized effectively and professional standards of operation must be maintained.

- Co-operation with relevant partners – for example, user groups and other professionals at local, regional, national as well as international level – has to be ensured.

- Services have to be physically accessible to all members of the community. This requires well-situated library buildings, good reading and study facilities, as well as relevant technologies and sufficient opening hours convenient to the users. It equally implies outreach services for those unable to visit the library.

- The library services must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural and urban areas.

- The librarian is an active intermediary between users and resources. Professional and continuing education of the librarian is indispensable to ensure adequate services.

- Outreach and user education programmes have to be provided to help users benefit from all the resources.

Implementing the Manifesto

Decision-makers at national and local levels and the library community at large, around the world, are hereby urged to implement the principles expressed in this Manifesto.

The Manifesto is prepared in co-operation with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

education students, like France, Italy and Spain.

There are in Europe almost as many models of academic library systems as there are countries: libraries for which responsibility lies with the state (Denmark, Portugal) or with regional governments (Germany), libraries that have central co-ordinating bodies (France) or are completely autonomous (United Kingdom, Italy, Spain), libraries participating in an exclusively academic network (Sweden, Norway) or sharing networks with public libraries (the Netherlands, Italy). In order to overcome the fragmentation of their administrative assets, academic libraries have oriented their policies towards co-operation. Such a collaborative attitude may be on a voluntary basis, as in the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, or have a legal foundation, as in France. The creation of common automated tools, such as union catalogues, serial lists or databases of special materials, as well as the diffusion of information technologies and networking, is creating the requirement to improve co-operation on an informal and often pragmatic basis.

On the eve of information superhighways, the rapid growth of electronic document services may raise questions about the copyright of documents and restricted rights of reproduction (see Chapter 26). In the words of Renoult (1994, p. 273), these 'may be more than technical problems; defining agreement among authors and publishers is the major problem of the nineties'.

Library networks in Europe

The increasing role of libraries within the information market depends very much on how library networks are going to develop in the future. Apart from being a formidable tool for co-operation between, and automation of, libraries, networks have undoubtedly boosted library activities. As they are today part of a virtually worldwide interconnected library via the Internet, the demand for library services is expected to increase at a remarkable speed.

The situation in Europe is rather 'balkanized', as Jacquesson (1995) put it. Library networks require, above all, continuing economic effort and timely updating of technologies. As they are promoted by national administrations, it is no surprise that every European state, except for Luxembourg, has its own network – and very often more than just one. Networks have been implemented in various ways; in some cases, a top-down approach has led to abstract patterns of application not always meeting library needs. In categorizing these approaches, four options may be identified: the regional, the administrative, the sectoral and the library system-related option.

The regional approach is particularly notable in the United Kingdom and Germany. In the United Kingdom, for instance, three regional networks, BLCMP, SWALCAP and VISCOUNT, interconnect libraries situated, respectively, in the Birmingham, south-west and south-east regions. In Germany there are almost as many *Verbundsysteme* as there are *Länder*. Achievements are indeed varied and leave gaps in library development. Regional discrepancies may be fatal: SCOLCAP (Scottish Libraries Co-operative Automation Project), which had long been in existence, did not survive its restructuring. Even more sensational has been the disappearance of the Swiss network REBUS (Réseau des Bibliothèques Utilisant Sibil), which was recently disbanded by its funding bodies.

The administrative option is typical in countries where a top-down approach for library policy and development is usual. France offers a good example. For a long time, library automation has been implemented in isolation, with the Bibliothèque Nationale going on a different track from research libraries. The new project of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France brings together some twenty libraries, mainly academic, for the purpose of co-operative cataloguing and acquisitions; it seems likely to lead eventually to the long-desired

automated French union catalogue. The result of this top-down option is that networked information (BN-OPALE, the database of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Pancatalogue*, the database of French university libraries, and *Catalogue collectif national des publications en série*) preceded the automation of library functions.

The sectoral approach is to be found especially in the Scandinavian countries, where the division between public and academic libraries is traditional. Not surprisingly, when automation was implemented two distinct networks emerged. Only in Denmark did a political decision provoke the merging of the two networks a few years ago.

In recent years there has been a tendency to interconnect libraries using the same automated library systems. Clubs of users spread all over Europe. In Spain, for instance, libraries using similar systems (like ALEPH or TINLIB) share resources thanks to the compatibility of their automated functions. Although this option may not be appropriate for all European countries, its easy implementation will certainly make such an approach more and more popular.

'The golden age of networks is now over', in the opinion of Jacquesson (1995, p. 207). Library networks blossomed during the 1980s, when they represented a real advance in library automation and working methodologies. Nowadays, the growing costs of their maintenance and management, the concurrent development of laser technologies (as optical disks), navigation on the Internet, and the emergence of integrated library systems working with standardized protocols on UNIX platforms have diminished their importance as bibliographic databases. They are no longer considered to be permanent, as the disappearance of REBUS, SCOLCAP and LIBRA (a French network) clearly illustrates. Their life is in danger unless they are able to provide new value-added services. This has been the case for PICA (Integrated Catalogue Automation Project), which

started as a department within the Hague Royal Library, with the aim of improving co-operation between the national library and university libraries, and has now been privatized.

Library and information schools

The last review of initial education for librarianship in Europe dates back to 1990, when the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) carried out an investigation of courses offered by library schools in the twelve countries of the European Community. The study was focused in particular on the information technology content of curricula (IFLA, 1990). Looking back at the results of such an investigation, it is easy to note that only six years ago information studies were still considered an innovative discipline. Today, information and communication technologies are permeating all programmes and new information technology-oriented courses have been developed in most of the library and information schools of Europe.

Not only has the nature of the studies changed, but also their status. In 1990, many library schools were considered as providers of professional education and therefore included in the national vocational training schemes. Today, schools are fully integrated in the higher-education system. Many trends can therefore be detected.

The first is a tendency towards diversification. The number of options and special subjects has increased, in order to meet a demand for abilities and skills likely to be applied in a variety of contexts. All important schools in Europe provide a wide range of options for different groups of students and information communities.

In 1990 the number of schools offering Master's and Ph.D. programmes was very low. Today the situation is rather the opposite. Although there are still countries, like Italy or Germany, where doctoral studies do not exist, many other countries provide this opportunity. Other interesting trends in library

and information studies are, on the one hand, the emphasis on information management in library curricula and, on the other, the favour which comparative and international librarianship enjoys today.

The only way to assess library school curricula is to see whether their content corresponds to the jobs offered by libraries and the competencies and skills that are required. An interesting survey carried out by the Direction de l'Information Scientifique des Technologies Nouvelles et des Bibliothèques (DISTB) of the French Ministry of Education identified no less than thirty-one jobs in French libraries (Université de Paris, 1995). In general, jobs identified in libraries are very obviously linked with library collections (cataloguing, acquisitions, collection development etc.), library management and automation. Some new and/or more specific jobs, however, are starting to become full-time positions in some libraries or groups of libraries; these include research and development, management of access to collections, and conservation.

It is no surprise to discover that cataloguing, in particular, is a skill which is superseded now by a more general competence in access to, and management of, bibliographic data. According to the same investigation, thirteen competencies corresponding to traditional library work were detected (library management, cataloguing, normalization, information retrieval, etc.). Together with them, nineteen more general competencies not specific to libraries were also identified and seem just as essential. Among these are included law, management, computing science, statistics, foreign languages and marketing. In the face of such a large number of general competencies, one may reasonably ask whether there is still a need to have specific schools for librarianship as such or if specific library curricula should be included as special subjects in more general courses of studies; paradoxically, library and information schools may be the victims of the success of information studies.

Library associations

In 1992, EBLIDA, the European Board of Libraries, Information and Documentation Associations, came into existence. With its thirty-eight full members and some eighty associate members, EBLIDA acts as the representative voice of the library and information science profession in European matters, and serves its interests.

The objectives of EBLIDA are to foster consultation between members on matters of common concern and to act as a channel of communication between members, and above all between members and the European Union organizations. Although it operates mainly within the European Union, EBLIDA is intending to become a forum for all European organizations, both in the Western and Eastern parts of Europe.

If we limit our analysis to the restricted sample of EBLIDA members, disparities in the status and size of professional organizations seem to mirror discrepancies in library developments in Europe. The bulk of its members comes from Northern Europe, in particular from the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. Especially in Scandinavian countries, the visibility of library associations is also ensured by the fact that some of them work as library staff trade unions.

The objectives of library associations are more or less the same all over Europe. All of them promote librarianship by encouraging readership and looking after the interests of their members. Many of them are active in providing training programmes, in promoting staff exchanges, in organizing symposia and conferences, and in publishing journals and bulletins. Some publish extensively in library science and lobby for librarians' interests within national parliaments. Only a few contribute to fix minimal standards for library education and assess governmental policies for libraries.

Though similar in the objectives they pursue, the structure and size of library associations differ

greatly in Europe, and not only because of regional disparities. For a country with a strong tradition of regionalism and particularism, it is remarkable that the Italian library association managed to maintain its unity, thanks to a flexible structure and the creation of regional boards. Such an achievement was impossible in Spain, where library and information associations are fragmented by both regions and sectors of activity, although there has been an attempt to create an umbrella organization (FESABID). In Germany, four associations, divided both by sector (academic and public librarians) and by rank (librarians and sublibrarians) formed in 1989 the Bundesvereinigung Deutscher Bibliotheksverbände. Even in France, where centralism is (or has been) a national belief, the effort to keep librarians unified has been unsuccessful and the Association des Bibliothécaires Français (ABF) does not represent the whole of the French profession.

Conclusions

Technological change, the 'convergence' phenomenon and electronic publishing are going to affect profoundly the prospects of libraries and documentation centres. However, rather than being sectorally oriented, their future will depend very much on how the chains of which they are essential links – the book and the information chains – evolve.

In relation to the book chain, not many changes are to be expected. A long-established practice and well-settled distinction of roles between publishers, librarians and booksellers does not leave room for surprise. The European print industry is expected to grow from 18,500 million ecus to 27,200 million ecus for the year 2000 (European Communities, 1993). Libraries, therefore, have only to adapt themselves to the increased flow of printed material. Some issues at stake between publishers and librarians, like lending rights and copyright, may create matters of contention in some countries (see Chapters 23 and 26).

A trend, however, may be noted. By virtue of information technologies applied to networked libraries, the traditional frontiers among categories of libraries are now blurred. Since it is possible to disseminate information through all points of the network, users can access it from all service points. Library models, which are sectoral and based on the category of users they serve, therefore need fresh updating. In other words, the topical distinction between, say, a public and an academic library is starting to fade.

In relation to the information chain, competencies normally used in libraries are now highly demanded. The convergence phenomenon has enlarged the range of actors working in the information sector and, therefore, increased the need for skills in information management. This will have opposite effects on libraries: on the one hand, it may incite former library users to leapfrog intermediate links and to go directly to the sources of information. On the other hand, it may cause libraries to acquire different functions in the new electronic environment and to 'converge' with other sectors of electronic publishing into new forms of information production and distribution.

In general, there are two strategic roles that libraries can play in the information environment. The first role is to act as active agents in the information industry. Although it can be said that this is practically the old library work differently labelled, the difference lies in the fact that libraries act now as commercial agents. This has not only enriched library budgets, but has also transformed librarians' work by making it more similar to that of information brokers.

In a limited number of cases, the new electronic environment may encourage libraries to be producers of the information they (or their parent institution) own. This is already the case for libraries holding rare books and unique collections. But – and this may be an important effect of electronic publishing on libraries – academic libraries wishing to dissemi-

nate the results of research undertaken by their parent institution into the vast ocean of the Internet may choose to be information producers by acting in practice as an academic press.

It is an illusion, however, to think that 95,800 libraries in Europe can immediately turn into businesses and start to make profit. In fact – and this is the second major role played by libraries in the information environment – technological advances and electronic publishing will reinforce their cultural and educational mission. It is well known that, in addition to primary and functional illiteracy, computer illiteracy is going to widen the gap between favoured and less favoured regions and groups of populations in Europe. There is much evidence to suggest that in future the dual society will grow larger, and not become smaller.

Many people were struck, I suppose, by the results of a recent investigation on adult illiteracy carried out by the OECD (1995). In contrast to the traditional means of assessment, adult illiteracy was not defined in terms of levels of education (completed number of years in primary and secondary school), but as a broad set of information-processing competencies; in other words, how adults use written information to function in society. It was a surprise to discover that in countries where literacy is considered to be high and there is a large percentage of people who have completed their first cycle of studies, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, from 6% to 14% of interviewees were unable to make any inference from the information presented in a weather chart, a newspaper or a diagram.

In interacting with electronic publishing products, the general public will have to overcome one more barrier. In addition to the classical 'three Rs' competencies, reading, writing and arithmetic, they will have to use new kinds of literacy in society, such as visual and technological literacy. There is a need, therefore, to start a new literacy 'movement' – and impetus for it should be given now.

By the year 2000, between 8% and 18% of the European book market will be electronic, with peaks of 15% to 25% for children's literature and 20% to 30% for scientific, technical and medical literature (European Communities, 1993). Libraries will have to carry, within the educational system, the great responsibility of raising the overall levels of literacy and of reducing cultural gaps between groups of populations. They will have to be the essential liaison between users, who will inevitably be more illiterate, and knowledge, that will inevitably be more redundant and therefore more complicated to access. They will have to be prepared to cope with printed, online and offline products distributed through a great variety of channels and carriers. While their functions and tasks may change, their ultimate mission will have to be more than ever cultural and educational. This is a further confirmation of the accuracy of the statement made in the UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto, in which libraries are considered to be 'a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups'. ■

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