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Information national policy: an overview

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Abstract

Library and Information Policy (LIP) remains essential yet underutilized, despite decades of discourse. This paper reviews its evolution and current status, highlighting the need for a distinct focus on libraries within national information frameworks. Analyzing policy issues and establishment processes, it identifies gaps and emphasizes the importance of context-specific approaches. Global efforts are examined, showcasing diverse approaches. The paper advocates for renewed attention to comprehensive LIP frameworks that recognize libraries' unique roles and address contemporary challenges.

Keywords

Libraries and information policies, national policy

1. Introduction

Library and Information Policy (LIP) is an old, new, and important topic at the same time. LIP is old because the policy was discussed in the middle of the last century, and new because the actual implementation is not performed widely compared to the amount of papers, conferences, and initiatives that published about information policy.

The policy was defined by Oxford dictionary as "A course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual" (Oxford, 2017)[1].Generally, the policy is very important to manage the relation between the government of certain country and issues that related to library and information profession within this country. Libraries are considered the most important organizations in any society. However, libraries have transformed dramatically during the past decade from places that hold books and other library materials ready for patrons to read or borrow to community centers that offer services beyond free access to books and other information resources. Accordingly, libraries' role in the societies has become vital in which governmental commitment is needed to manage the relationship between libraries and societies they serve. Further, to manage the relationship among libraries within the library community.

Libraries and Information Policies (LIP) had a great attention on the national level since the middle of the 19th century. Nowadays, few countries have implemented and followed a national policy for libraries and information. However, many other countries are still at the stage of discussing the LIP implementation. Among the countries in which implemented the LIP, a very few of them pay enough attention to libraries as in most cases library policies are considered a sub-element under information national policy.

2. Terminology issue

When reviewing the literature that discussed the libraries' national policy, few terms were found that used to express the same topic. Further, the libraries' national policy was mentioned in variant contexts within the reviewed literature. In some cases, the national policy was mentioned as a separate policy, and in other cases, the policy was mentioned as part of information national policy, or national information technology policy. In some countries, the policy was represented as part of national education policies or national book policy.

Different levels of policies related to libraries and information are programs or campaigns for reading or libraries in a local country. This trend is very common in Latin America countries; however, this type of works does not rise to the level of policy. (Bustamante, 2007)[2]

After reviewing the literature, we can list the following terms used to express libraries national policy:

- Libraries national policy.
- Information national policy.
- Information technology national policy.
- National book policy.
- National policy for library and information systems and services.
- National policy for information service.
- National policy on library and information systems.
- National Reading Program.
- National Reading and Libraries Program.
- National Books and Reading Program.
- National Reading Plan.
- National Reading Campaign.

3. Definitions

In the following section, some definitions of libraries and information national policy will be presented. The definitions have different point of views. Some of them focus on policy as a set of laws on the national level, and some others focus on plans and strategies.

Information policy defined by Mc-Clure and Jaeger as a set of specific goals created by governments to shape the creation, access, management, exchange, security, display, collection, and other uses of information. (Mc-Clure and Jaeger, 2008)[3]

Other definitions associated policies with laws that related to information. Jaeger defined information policy as a combination of laws, regulations, rules, and guidelines that steer the creation, management, and use of information. (Jaeger, Paul T., 2007)[4]. In the same context, the definitions of Braman and Weingarten claimed that information policy is comprised of laws, regulations, and doctrinal positions– and other decision making and practices with society-wide constitutive effects – involving information creation, processing, flows, access,

and use. (Braman, 2011)[5]. Weingarten provided almost the same definition "Information policy encompasses the set of all public sector laws, regulations, and policies that encourage, discourage, or regulate the creation, use, storage, communication, and presentation of information. (Weingarten, 1989)[6]

Different approach in information policy definition provided by Pajaro and Betancourt; "Information policy is the array of guidelines and directives guiding preparation of planned actions to guarantee universal access to information in order to pursue all kinds of activities (social, economic and political), thereby helping achieve a country's development goals" (Pajaro and Betancourt, 2007)[7]

Information policy according to Orna is "'a dynamic tool', which can be used as the basis for developing an organizational information strategy; and which can 'relate everything that is done with information to the organization's overall objectives; enable effective decisions on resource allocation; promote interaction, communication and mutual support between all parts of the organization, and between it and its "customers" or public; provide objective criteria for assessing the results of information based activities; [and] give feedback to the process of developing corporate policies" (Orna, 2008)[8]

Maxwell defined information policies as the social, political, legal, economic and technological decisions about the role of information in society. These decisions operate both at a societal level when applied to national and international policy, and at an instrumental level, as they impact the creation, dissemination, use, and preservation of information. (Maxwell, Terrence A., 2003)[9]

Mêgnigbêto's definition of the information policy is "the set of strategies and actions defined at a geographical or institutional level in order to satisfy information needs expressed by people and assure development goals". (Mêgnigbêto, 2010)[10]

"Information policy is a broad concept. It covers any aspect of policy making at an organizational, local, national or international levelthat has impact on information flow, whether in electronic or any other format" (Calanag, 2003)[11]

According to NIDA (Supporting Societies' Needs, 2011)[12] the libraries national policy defined as "a framework for the planned and coordinated development of a country's libraries. It is a plan of action and a statement of ideals proposed or adopted by a government"

Another brief definition by Mohamed asserted that; "A national policy for library and information service provides an overall framework or master-plan for the development of these services" (Mohamed, 1989)[13]

After presenting the previous definitions, we can notice that the term "Information national policy "was adopted more than the term "Libraries national policy". This noticeable remark will be more clear in the literature review and when presenting the global and local efforts on the information national policies.

4. Policy issues

The national policy should cover a set of issues that have to be organized on the national level. Since the 1990s, some authors suggested a different set of issues, and no unified opinion was found regarding the issues that have to be included in the national policy. However, there are some similarities between the authors as follow:

Yusof, Basri and Zin suggested six main issues, and under the six issues there are about 92 sub-elements. The six main issues are:

1. Scientific information.
2. Library service.
3. Information technology (ICT)
4. Social issues.
5. Governmental information.
6. Economy. (Yusof, Basri & Zin, 2010)[14]

McClure and Jaeger had their own contribution in determining the policy issues, they put very wide issues that need more details, and however, they did not give further explanation of these issues:

1. National security.
2. Telecommunications.
3. E-rate and universal service.
4. Privacy.
5. Public access. (McClure&Jaeger)[15]

Duff contributed a list of ten issues that related to the national policy of information. He named the issues with "Normative List of Information Policy Issues:

1. Information circulation freedom.

2. Privacy.

3. Data security and protection.

4. Official secrets.

5. Library service and archives.

6. Scientific medical documentation.

7. Governmental publications.

8. Copyright and intellectual property.

9. Information infrastructure on national level.

10. Flow of information internationally. (Duff, 2004)[16]

The suggested issues were very comprehensive, and covered many areas related to information national policy, however at the same time; it included some issues that should not be in the information policy.

Rowlands provided different approach regarding information policy issues, he considered that national policy should consist of some other sub-policies, which means that each issue is a separated policy. Rowlands suggested nine sub-policies:

1. Governmental publications policy.

2. Information technology policy.

3. Telecommunications and broadcasting policy.

4. Communications policy.

5. Information disclosure privacy.

6. Information and Computer regulation and crimes.

7. Copyrights policy.

8. Library service and archives policy.

9. Governmental information dissemination policy. (Rowlands, 1996)[17]

Another contribution that provided different approach and philosophy provided by Moore who asserted that policy has to contend with three main levels: the industrial level, organizational level, and social level. Then he identified four issues that information policy has to deal with:

1. Information technology.

2. Information markets.

3. Human resources.

4. Legislation and regulation. (Moore, 1996)[18]

One of the most recent contribution was provided by Arnold. After analysing many of contributions regarding issues of information policy, she identified two categories of issues that should be included in the national information policy:

1. Issues related to factors such as time, place and historical situations

> a. Access to information.
> b. Access to governmental information.
> c. Literacy.
> d. Technology literacy level.
> e. Education and skills.
> f. Information society.
> g. Information content, industrial competitiveness.
> h. Other issues; e-commerce … etc.

2. Issues addressed from countries cases of information policies

> a. Telecommunication infrastructure.
> b. Copyright and intellectual property.
> c. Industrial property rights.
> d. Freedom of expression.
> e. Censorship.
> f. Information ownership.
> g. Libraries and archives. (Arnold, 2007)[19]

We can notice the following points from the suggested issues:

> 1. Information national policy is wider than libraries national policy.

> 2. Libraries considered as a part of the national information policy, and were common issue in three of the contributed issues above.

> 3. Some issues were common in at least three of the contributions: libraries, government information, and information technology.

5. Establishing of policies

Establishing the information policies is a huge project and includes many procedures and phases. Some authors went beyond developing the policy to policy's evaluation and implementation UNESCO issued a document about how to formulate a policy; it defines three main phases for the establishment of information policy on the national level, and each phase has sub-steps:

> **1. Formulation of information national policy**

a. Information environment evaluation.

b. Preparing preliminary documents.

c. Organizing the national consultation.

2. Official approval of the information national policy.

a. Preparing the final version of the policy.

b. Submitting the proposal.

c. Integration with the development policy.

3. Implementation of information national policy

a. Creating coordination methods.

b. Developing action plan.

c. Financial issues.

d. Operation and evaluation. (Montviloff, 1990)[20]

Pajaro suggested two main phases for establishing thee information policy. The first phase is the preliminary phase, and then the second phase is the description of the policy. Each phase includes sub-steps:

1. Description of the preliminary phase

a. Pre-assessment

b. Assessment and situational analysis

2. Description of the basic elements of the NIP

a. Institutionalization and formulation

b. Application

c. Evaluation

d. Review, continuation or termination. (Pajaro, 2007)[21]

Once again, with Rowlands' contribution, he defined very extensive five stages to the establishment of national information policy:

1. Identifying the problem and preparing the agenda.

2. Formulation of information Policy.

3. Adoption of information Policy.

4. Implementation of Information Policy.

5. Evaluation the policy after implementation. (Rowlands, 1996)[22]

6. Efforts around the world

Since the 40s of the 20th century, the efforts started in terms of developing a national policy for libraries. Early calls for libraries national policy appeared in the UK in 1942 by McColvin Report (L. R., 1943)[23], which called the government to undertake setting up a national policy for libraries. In the United States, the 36th president ordered to establish the "National Advisory Commission on Libraries" in 1966, the Commission issued a report on the development of national policy for libraries in the US. (National Advisory Commission on Libraries, 1968)[24]

On the global level, the UNESCO launched NATIS program in 1975, which aimed at establishing an integrated plan for national and international action in terms of information national policy. Famous organizations participated in that program, for example: FID, IFLA, ICA, and IDRC. (NATIS News, 1975)[25]

In this section, efforts in different areas of the world will be presented in more detailed.

6.1. Global efforts

UNESCO as the global voice of culture adopted a program to support countries to develop their own national information policy. The program designed for members of UNESCO and in particular the developing countries. NATIS program was one of the outputs of the "Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Libraries and Archives Infrastructure" which organized by UNESCO in September 1974. The recommendations of the conference were endorsed by UNESCO General Conference which held in November 1974. (Carroll, 1976) [26]

NATIS program defined 14 main requirements for countries that like to take an action and implement its own national information policy:

1. National information policy.
2. User awareness.
3. Promoting the reading as a habit.
4. Evaluation of users' needs.
5. Current information resources analysis.
6. Investigating of manpower.
7. Organizational structure of NATIS.
8. Providing the required manpower for NATIS.
9. Providing the required technology for NATIS.
10. Legislative framework needed for NATIS.

11. Financing NATIS.

12. Universal bibliographic control.

13. Supporting members of UNESCO to implement NATIS.

14. Promoting the universal bibliographic control. (UNESCO, 1975)[27]

"The Information for All Programme" (IFAP) was established by UNESCO to provide a framework for international co-operation and partnerships in "building an information society for all." In 2009, this program issued a document entitled: "National information society policy" which developed to help UNESCO members countries in the establishment of their national policy for the information society.(UNESCO, 2009)[28]. The document mainly focused on information society, and the position of libraries within information society was almost absent from this document.

General Information Program & UNISIST led another important contribution by UNESCO in 1990. The document was a handout for the formation of national policies on information. The handout defined the basic concepts of the information policy and why it's important, then it set the main steps of the establishment of national information policy, the handout defined three main stages:

1. Formulation of a national policy on information.

2. Official approval of a national policy on information.

3. Implementation of national policy on information. (Montviloff, 1990)[29]

Apparently Montviloff's document fulfills the goals of this research, however, the time gap should be considered. From 1990 to 2018, many changes have affected library and information science on both academic and practical levels. With the growing revolution of information technology and communications, legal aspects and relations between libraries and governments also should be considered. In conjunction with most of the previous efforts, Montviloff's document had underrepresented or ignored the libraries within information national policy. All of those factors prove the need for new guidelines for the formulation of libraries national policy.

6.2. Europe

The early writings about libraries and information national policy began in Europe since the middle of the 20th century. One of the most recent significant efforts were led by EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information, Documentation

Archives) and NAPLE (National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe) by organizing a conference on "Library policy for Europe" which was held in Vienna, May 2009. The conference resulted what's known as "Vienna Declaration". The declaration agreed on the important role of library service in European community in the way to the knowledge society.(EBLIDA, 2009)[30] As a result, EBLIDA committed to work on strategic plans to move towards a library policy for Europe.

Regarding individual countries that worked for having libraries national policy, Finland is a good example. Finland started in 2001 by establishing Finnish Library Policy programme, in 2003 "Library strategy 2010" was issued by the program and it contained two main sections starting points and measures; and suggested steps. Then in 2009, The Finnish Public Library Policy 2015 was published and included an update to the previous strategies and programs in order to adapt pt to the changes in libraries' functions and environment. (Ryynänen, 2011)[31]

6.3. America

Efforts towards establishing a national policy for libraries started in the mid of the 20th century when the 36th president of US, Lyndon B. Johnson ordered to form the National Advisory Commission on Libraries in 1966. According to the presidential order, the committee had four main tasks:

> 1. Studying the role of libraries as a source of knowledge and information.
> 2. Evaluation of policies, programs, and practices that affect the role of libraries.
> 3. Evaluation of libraries situation in the states regarding funds, and federal support.
> 4. Development of recommendations for action by government and other organizations to ensure an effective role for libraries on the national level.

The committee recommended that the US government have to declare the national policy for libraries as a law issued by the American Congress, and to declare that the United States has to provide library and information service to the American people, then the committee assigned six goals that will support the library national policy on the long term. The goals summarized as follow:

> 1. Providing library and information services for all levels of education.
> 2. Providing library and information services for people in public.
> 3. Providing materials to support scientific research in all disciplines.
> 4. Providing bibliographic control and access to the national resources.

5. Providing physical access to resources.

6. Providing training for libraries manpower.

In order to achieve the previous goals, the committee suggested few recommendations to assist with the achievement of these goals:

1. Establishment of the "National Commission on Library and Information Science" as a permanent federal agency.

2. Recognizing and strengthen the role of Library of Congress.

3. Establishment of a federal Institute of Library and Information Science as a principal center.

4. Recognition and accepting the role the "United States Office of Education" in meeting needs for library service.

5. Supporting the state library agencies. (National Advisory Commission on Libraries, 1968)[32]

In 2015, the American Library Association led a new initiative entitled "The Policy Revolution! Initiative". ALA Office for Information Technology Policy developed an agenda in coordination with major library organizations that support the Library Advisory Committee for the Policy Revolution; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded the project. The project is three years grant and supports efforts to strengthen the national stakeholder involvement and increase library policy advocacy capacity. (ALA, 2015)[33]

The national policy agenda has main goals to achieve:

1. Changing the conversation about libraries in the American community.

2. Formation a nostalgic character in our history to an essential player in the American nation's story.

3. Assisting focus and guide the library community's collective outreach to key decision makers and influencers. (ALA, 2015)[34]

The agenda mainly was developed for library leaders in the US, and it's clearly stated that no intend to use it outside of library community, and further documents will be issued for advocacy purposes. Although the agenda cannot be considered a national policy, however, it is very important agenda in the way to national policy for libraries in the US. The agenda invites library community to use it as a tool when making conversation with the decision makers.

6.4. Asia

In Asia, an early effort in the establishment of information national policy was found. India was the first country that has a national policy for information that was issued in 1986. The Indian policy started in the 1950s when Ranganathan recommended establishing a national policy for India in his famous paper "Library development plan: thirty-year programme for India", then in 1977 NISSAT (National Information System for Science and Technology) was established and started to prompt the government to develop a national information policy. In the 30th conference of the Indian Library Association in 1984, the issue was discussed, and then a draft policy statement was submitted to the government in 1985.

In October 1985, the Department of Culture Government of India formed a "Committee on National Policy on Library and Information System" The committee submitted its report to the government in 1986, and was entitled "National Policy on Library and Information Systems (NAPLIS)" (Dasgupta, 2005)[35]

NAPLIS addressed all main issues related to library and information service on the national level:

1. Public libraries system.
2. Academic libraries system.
3. Special libraries and information system.
4. National library and bibliographic service.
5. Manpower development and professional status.
6. Modernization of library and information systems.
7. General issues related to the profession.
8. Implementing agencies and financial support of the policy. (NAPLIS)[36]

Another noticeable effort in Asia was in Malaysia. A Preparatory Committee to Plan the National Information System was established and the committee adopted the global efforts of UNESCO in which had two main goals:

1. To plan for building a national information system in Malaysia based on NATIS document of UNESCO.
2. To plan the requirements of the implementation of the national system. (Mohamed, 1989)[37]

The second attempt was sparked in 1984 when UNESCO granted Oli Mohamed $9000 in order to organize a workshop to discuss how to formulate a national policy for library and information system in Malaysia. Teamwork was formed as a result of the workshop, and the director of the national library was appointed as

a chair of the team. Several meetings were held and resulted in a draft policy in 1987. (Abdul Hamid, 1992)[38]

6.5. Africa

There are many papers were found requesting and planning for national information policy in many African countries, like Nigeria, Serra Lion, Zambia, South Africa. However, the actual action in the way for libraries and information national policy was taken by South Africa and Namibia.

In 1995, a new project started in South Africa; it was entitled "The National Information and Communication Project (NICP)". The project was funded by Canadian International Development Research Centre's (IDRC). The project issued in 2001 a handbook entitled "An Information Policy Handbook for Southern Africa" The handbook discussed different aspects related to information policy in the Southern Africa area with special focus on South Africa, it discussed the concept and issues of information policy, and presented an analysis of information policy in South Africa and main initiatives, also discussed other issues related to the policy, like: educational technology and e-commerce. (NICP, 2001)[39]

In 1997; the National Libraries and Archives Service (NLAS) of Namibia has issued the first policy for libraries; "Information for Self Reliance and Development", then in 2009 NLAS renewed the national policy in order to keep up the new and fast change in libraries and information resources. The updated policy included the following issues:

1. **Key strategic elements.**

    a. Coordination.
    b. Leadership.
    c. Laws and legislations.
    d. Human resources.
    e. Education and training.

2. **Resources.**

    a. Information resources for library and information services.
    b. Namibian content
    c. Information for development
    d. Funding
    e. Information and communications technology.

3. **Policies for individual library and information sectors.**

      a. National Library of Namibia

      b. National Archives of Namibia

      c. Specialized and research libraries

      d. Community libraries

      e. School libraries/ media centers.

      f. Higher education libraries. (NLAS, 2009)[40]

Conclusions

1. The time gap between last recognized efforts regarding national policies that was conducted on 1990 by UNESCO and this research is over 27 years. During this period, the revolution of information technology exploded and the widespread of the internet which affected all communities. The UNESCO had adopted a new policy in 1990 after 15 years from developing the first policy "NATIS" in 1975.

2. The concept and role of libraries has been dramatically changed from 1990 until now. Information technology and the internet have affected all types of institutions. Therefore, the role and contribution of libraries in the society have completely changed, and libraries are no longer the places that only allow people to read and borrow books but institutions that deliver services to patrons in almost every aspect of life. Accordingly, the big change in libraries requires new tools to organize the relationship between libraries and the official authorities.

3. As will be presented in the literature review, libraries were included as a small part of information national policy in some attempts and ignored in others in which not enough to address all issues related to libraries. Therefore, having an independent policy for libraries will provide good opportunity to cover and focus on all issues that concern libraries on the national level.

4. Adopting the guidelines for national policy by UNESCO was great work, however, if such efforts were adopted by international institution in libraries field, the impact would be greater. IFLA, as the global voice of libraries has the ability to involve many countries in global projects. Recently, IFLA has two successful examples; The IFLA International Advocacy Program (IAP), and IFLA Global Vision Program. Over 100 countries were participated in both programs.

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