National libraries' functions: results from the 2016 survey of national libraries' functions

Patrice Landry
Swiss National Library, Bern, Switzerland.
Patrice.landry@nb.admin.ch

Abstract:

This paper reports on the survey on national libraries' functions conducted on behalf of the National Libraries Section in 2016. In 2012, the Section discussed possible options for updating guidelines that referred to the functions of national libraries, including Peter Lor's 1997 Guidelines for legislation for national libraries. These discussions led to the work undertaken by Andy Stephens in presenting a set of national library functions exemplar. In the context of that pilot project, case studies and examples of concrete applications of functions of 12 national libraries provided an empirical testimony of how national libraries undertake these functions.

The 2016 survey was distributed to all national libraries through the mailing list of the CDNL (Conference of Directors of National Libraries) and 46 responses from 45 sovereign states were received. The results of the survey will be presented at the WLIC 2017 meeting of the CDNL and at the open session of the National Information and Library Policy Special Interest Group. During this session, issues relating to particular functions will be disused by a panel of representative national libraries. A particular topic will be the relationship between the functions and the legal mandate of national libraries in pursuing these activities.

Keywords: National library, functions, CDNL, IFLA National Libraries Section, National Information and Library Policy Special Interest Group

Introduction

At the IFLA National Library Section meeting in 2012, the Standing Committee discussed possible options for updating the 1997 Guidelines for legislation for national libraries[1] and decided that an overview or comparative study of the current functions, tasks and roles of national libraries should be undertaken. - exploring what are the current functions of national libraries and how they accomplish the tasks associated with those functions.

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[1] Lor, P. (1997). Guidelines for legislation for national library services. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001095/109568eo.pdf

The present survey builds on / follows up on the work carried out by Andy Stephens (pilot study 2015).[2] The survey was drafted by Hans Jansen and Martijn Kleppe from the National Library of the Netherlands (KB) and Genevieve Clavel and Patrice Landry from the Swiss National Library. Martijn Kleppe managed the survey and carried out the preliminary analyses. The survey software was provided by IFLA.

The draft survey was initially sent out to the members of the IFLA National Libraries standing committee in April 2016 (18 responses). The full survey was then sent to the members of the CDNL (Conference of Directors of National Libraries) via the CDNL list – October- December 2016 (28 responses).

In all, 46 responses from 45 sovereign states were received. The full results may be seen here: http://national-library-functions-v3.silk.co/ :

- Europe – 27 responses (58%)
- Asia / Oceania – 9 responses (20%)
- South America / central America & Caribbean – 4 responses (9%)
- Africa – 4 responses (9%)
- North America – 2 responses (4%)

Despite a number of reminders, few replies were received from colleagues in Africa and South America. This should be taken into account in the following discussion of the findings.

The survey did not investigate if the functions described, are, within each national library, mandated by government policy (statutes). It may be possible in some cases that functions are not undertaken because they are not part of the legal mandate of the national library. In addition, it is not known if resources allocated to national libraries are solely attributed based on the legal mandate or if national libraries have discretional powers to undertake certain special functions in response to national information needs.

In the panel discussion following the presentation of results, this issue will be raised

2017 survey: findings

Collection development

One of the fundamental tasks of national libraries is to collect the national production of documents in print and electronic form as well as cartographic, music documents, graphic and audiovisual documents. Documents are acquired in most cases through legal deposit, though the coverage of documents set by legislation differs from country to country. In other instances, other agreements are negotiated with publishers, such as voluntary agreement and partial purchase agreements.

The survey confirmed that legal deposit is the main source of acquisition of national libraries (93.5%) while voluntary agreements account for 4.3%. Only one library reported that it had no acquisition agreement or legislation.

While 100% of the libraries collect printed materials (monographs, periodicals and other printed materials), between 67.4 and 78.2 % of the libraries collect sound recordings, musical scores and posters. This represents the traditional type of documents principally acquired by national libraries. Less than 50% of libraries reported that they collect photographs (48%) and audiovisual materials (32%). In addition, libraries acquire other types of documents, including maps and atlases (58.7%) and postcards (23.9%)

E-deposit is a task that national libraries have undertaken in the last 10 to 15 years. 71.7% of the libraries reported that they acquire e-document either through legal deposit (63%) or through a voluntary agreement (8.7%). E-books (90.9%) and e-periodicals (81.8%) are the two types of documents most acquired by these national libraries, followed by websites (63.6%) and e-newspapers (60.6%). Other types of digital materials, such as social media, blogs, sound recordings, streaming video

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[2] Stephens, A. (2016). Functions. Tasks and roles of national libraries in the 21st century. Alexandria 26 (2), 145-198.

and audiviosual broadcasts are collected by an average of only 21% of libraries collecting digital documents. The survey confirms that national libraries are generally committed to building a strong digital collection that includes a variety of digital materials, from e-books to social media, sound recording, audio-visual broadcast and streaming video.

Trends:
- National libraries are still committed to collecting the national production of documents in print and electronic form as well in other traditional formats
- National libraries are progressively acquiring digital format documents, mostly e-books and e-journals.
- No obvious split in north / south or small / large national libraries in developing digital collections

Issues for discussion:
- Developing an e-deposit legislation or agreement may be a factor in building a digital collection
- National library mandate: are digital documents part of the mandate?
- How can we coordinate mandates in the field of digital collections when the concept of territoriality is no longer the same as for analogue material

Collection management / Metadata

In building the national collections, national libraries must ensure they provide a proper bibliographic access to them through their online catalogue and the national bibliography. The challenge for national libraries is to provide cataloguing data as soon as possible after the documents are acquired in order to list the material in the national bibliography / online catalogue and thus provide cataloguing metadata to publishers and libraries.

The survey confirmed that national libraries consider this to be one of their core functions. All of the libraries that responded to the survey have their own cataloguing / indexing services. While it is expected that the library will need to create new metadata records since the library is often one of the first libraries to receive the documents, some national libraries will purchase metadata records (34.7%) or use derived records (21.7%). Most national libraries will rely on their own indexing services for providing subject access but there is a trend in using automatic indexing (15.2%).

One new trend in the delivery of metadata is to make the data freely available to third parties (other libraries, researchers) for re-use. The survey reported that 67.4% of the national libraries are opening up their metadata for free re-use while 8.6% are aiming at opening their metadata in the near future.

Trends:
- National libraries remain committed to creating their own metadata but are nevertheless using other strategies to catalogue / index their collections and enriching them
- Many national libraries (from different regions) are already making their metadata freely available but it is difficult to predict the evolution of this trend.

Issues for discussion:
- What are the challenges facing national libraries in providing a timely and complete bibliographic access to their collections.
- What tools or strategies can we develop to guarantee these services ?
- What are the incentives for national libraries for making their metadata freely available? Government policy? Business plan?

Preservation and Conservation

National libraries have the responsibility to ensure the preservation of their collections for future generations as well as for the current users of the collections. The challenge for national libraries is to ensure that all types and formats of documents should receive the appropriate conservation and preservation treatment to ensure their perennity. At stake is the preservation of digital documents, which requires new resources and technology, tools and knowledge.

The survey inquired about the existence of an in-house conservation service or facility. Most of the libraries (67.4%) have such a service or facility while some libraries (21.7%) from Europe, South America did not have one. Most libraries (except one) reported that they used at least one preservation and conservation method, with most having a controlled storage environment (95.5%). Other methods used were traditional restoration (88.8%), the use of acid-free packaging (84.4%) and deacidification (57.7%). 71.1% reported that they had an up-to-date disaster plan. In addition, most libraries (86.9%) are sharing their preservation and conservation documentation and expertise with other institutions.

In terms of preservation, the national libraries are very engaged in ensuring that endangered documents are preserved in other formats. Most libraries (95.6%) try to digitise these documents while 50% transfer the documents to both microfilm and digital formats.

The survey has also confirmed the engagement of national libraries for digital preservation. Most national libraries (76.1%) have either a digital preservation system (67.4%) or are using multiple systems or suite of tools (4.34%). Another 4.34% of libraries are in the process of developing a system. For national libraries that are not using any type of digital preservation system(s) or developing one (23.9%), it appears that most either are smaller libraries or are situated in Africa or Asia. Financial or technical support may be an issue for this lack of a system. It is also important to mention that only 45.7% of the libraries have a written digital preservation strategy that is publically available (published). Lastly, very few national libraries (36.9%) use an established standard to certify their digital preservation policy.

Trends:
- It appears that there may be a gap between large national libraries and smaller national libraries and non-European national libraries in having proper digital preservation systems
- Preservation and conservation of traditional types and formats of documents are firmly established in most national libraries.

Issues for discussion:
- While most national libraries are engaged in digitisation for preservation and / or access purposes, there are gaps in system development and policies
- What policies should be recommended? Is certification a goal?

Making collections available

National libraries are generally mandated to have a national bibliographic agency, usually as a division of the national library to compile a list of the current acquisitions of national publications. The national bibliographic agency should also promote and monitor the use of ISBN, ISSN, ISNI and other bibliographic numbering systems. National libraries should also contribute to making collections available either through interlibrary loans or union catalogues.

Most of the national libraries (87%) have reported that they are publishing a national bibliography. For national libraries that have answered "no" and "other, namely", it appears that they (except one) have integrated the national bibliography data in their online catalogue. In response to the question of whether the national library was an ISBN, ISSN, CIP or other agency or service provider, 80.5% reported that they are engaged in at least one of these activities:
- ISBN: 58.6%
- ISSN: 60.8%
- CIP: 41.3%
- Others (ISMN,ISNI, ISAN, URN:nbn): 26%

For libraries not involved in these services, it appears that these services are generally the responsibility of other institutions.

Questions regarding the facilitation of the national union catalogue and coordination of interlibrary loan received an average / balanced response. 58.7% of national libraries are involved in national union catalogues while 47.8% have the responsibility of coordinating interlibrary loans. On site reading services (i.e. reading rooms, catalogues, reference materials, internet access, etc.) are provided by nearly all the responding libraries.

There are still some issues with national libraries' websites, in particular with having a responsive design (56.5%) and a website accessible for disabled users (52.2%). The results cover all regions and size of national libraries. The use of new media, Flickr, Wikimedia for the dissemination of the collections is used by 67.3% of the national libraries from all of the regions.

Trends:
- National libraries are generally ensuring all public services (all regions)
- Most use new medias and use their websites to communicate and promote their services

Issues for discussion:
- Is the notion of a national bibliography outdated?
- Is a national union catalogue still needed in the context of digital networks

Outreach

National libraries organise various events to promote their collections and services. In particular, the library will organise exhibitions to highlight and raise awareness of the richness and diversity of the collections. National libraries also organise cultural and educational events to promote literacy and reading. They will also publish documentation and research on their collections and services.

All of the national libraries reported that they at least organise one event to promote the cultural and scientific achievements of their country. Physical exhibitions (95.6%) and lectures / readings (91.3%) are the most preferred type of activities, while virtual exhibitions, tours, open days and workshops are generally organised by 67% of the libraries from all regions. Hackathon events is a recent type of event organised by national libraries to make use of open access data. Only 28.2% of the responding libraries, mainly from Europe and North America organise this type of event.

National libraries undertake commercial activities such as publishing, book /gift shops (both physical and online) to promote their research and their collections. The survey reported that 67.4% of national libraries from all regions engaged in commercial activities, including publishing.

Trends:
- Outreach tasks are well established in most national libraries
- Growing trend in engaging in digital outreach activities

Issues for discussion:
- How can the use and exploitation of digital data and collections be more developed in all regions?

Cooperation and collaboration

National libraries are expected to cooperate and collaborate with all kind of libraries to develop and coordinate national services.

The survey indicated that all but one national library among respondents have a government mandate to collaborate with institutions from their country. Their main national partners are academic libraries (93.4%), public libraries (91.3%) and universities (91.3%) and museums (82.6%).

To a lesser extent, national libraries also collaborate with regional libraries (67.3%), audiovisual archives (60.8%) and research data archives (56.5%). Others have reported collaboration with archives, parliamentary library, government libraries and research institutes.

The survey also confirmed that many national libraries (91.3%) play a role in developing a national information and library policy. Most have an active role while 13% of national libraries intervene indirectly.

On the international cooperation level, most national libraries (86.9%) have an official mandate to collaborate with institutions worldwide. Their two main institutional partners are national libraries (89.1%) and academic libraries (69.5%).

Trends:
- Cooperation and collaboration functions are well established

Issues for discussion:
- How can national libraries strengthen their cooperation even more?
- Can responding libraries who pay a role in developing national information and library policies provide examples to other libraries / countries to assist in developing this elsewhere?

Special functions

National libraries, in addition to their traditional and core functions are sometime asked to take on new functions, either as part of new government policy or new developments in library services. The current digital environment has also created new expectations in the creation and delivery of services and many national libraries have responded favourably to these changes. The 2015 pilot study had identified 10 special functions that some national libraries had integrated in their suite of functions. The survey aimed to determine the extent of libraries undertaking these responsibilities.

In the survey, a majority of national libraries reported their engagement in two special functions: the development of library standards (76%) and the promotion of reading and information literacy (60.8%). Major libraries, including national libraries, have been involved in standards work since the 20th century, mainly in the area of bibliographic, library systems and conservation and preservation. For national libraries, this responsibility could be seen as an extension of their national engagement in the provision of library services. The libraries that responded to this represented libraries from all regions and of different size and stage of development. The second function, promotion of reading and information literacy, was also well represented geographically and by different size of libraries. While this function had not been mentioned in the national libraries guidelines from the 1980s (Sylvestre and Line), the promotion of information awareness was added in Lor's Guidelines for legislation for national library services (1997).

There are emerging functions in the area of digital environment:

- Collaboration with universities in the field of Digital Humanities: 47.8%
- Providing digital services for public libraries: 45.6%
- Actively linking the library's collection to collections outside the libraries domain (linked data): 43.4%

Most of the libraries undertaking these functions are mainly from Europe and by larger national libraries.

Trends:
- Digital environment is impacting on the national libraries responsibilities
- Literacy and standards are well-established functions – are they becoming core activities?

Issues for discussion:
- Additional non-core / traditional functions to the existing responsibilities of national libraries – are government agencies supporting these new responsibilities?
- Links to the UN2030 https://www.ifla.org/libraries-development and SDG 4?
- What are the constraints for libraries not yet involved in digital tasks?

The last question of the survey asked national libraries which other activities will be important to them in the coming five years. Twenty libraries responded to this question (43.4%) with two categories of responses:

- Some will be integrating existing trends: digitisation, preservation / conservation centre, open access, open linked data, digital preservation.
- Others will engage in: digital collection advocacy, acquisition / archiving of self-published electronic and print material, national virtual library network, staff competencies / development of human capital, research faculty for big data, text and data mining and curation.

Conclusion

The responses to the last question reflect the engagement of national libraries in keeping up with the digital environment that is redefining some of the principal functions of national libraries. The survey has indicated a willingness of national libraries, according to their means and resources, to keep up with new demands and needs from the digital environment. The integration of e-documents in the heritage collection, the availability of metadata for free re-use and the push toward digital preservation are indications of national libraries worldwide to expand library and information provisions relating to their functions. While development is uneven in some areas, namely in those requiring large investment in capital and human resources, it is nevertheless important to stress that libraries that responded to this survey are all involved in some ways in achieving these goals. The survey also demonstrated that the national libraries' guidelines developed over the last 40 years are still relevant today. The context may have changed, as for example technology and formats but the principal /core functions are still part of the mandate and missions of national libraries.

As with all international surveys, the issue is to determine if the responses to the present survey are representative of all national libraries. This paper recommends continuous discussions in all national libraries' organisations to gain additional insight in the fulfilment of national functions and aims of all national libraries. In addition, the IFLA National Libraries Section Standing Committee should consider updating the guidelines with examples showing how national libraries ensure continuity but also adapt their functions to their new technological environment (e.g. e-deposit).

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