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**THE JAMAICA UNION CATALOGUE: OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES**

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# THE JAMAICA UNION CATALOGUE: OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

## Introduction

This paper seeks to contribute to the conference objective of “Reviewing of the network’s provision [of] and access to information in support of national economic, human and social development” and, to a lesser extent, the objective of “Recommitment of the focal point libraries to further development of the network”.

This paper is written with the assumption that the National Information System for Jamaica has been described in previous papers such as those presented by Professor Daphne Douglas and Mrs. Winsome Hudson. It will not therefore provide that contextual base.

It discusses the concept of a Union Catalogue as a tool for the provision of information and for providing access to information and the associated strategies as conceived by the second plan for the national information system of Jamaica. It also examines the ‘evolved’ objectives and strategies. The documents which have been primarily used as the basis for the concept, objectives and for strategies are the NACOLADS publication Second Plan for a National Documentation, Information and Library System for Jamaica; a paper presented by Byron Palmer, then Network Manager of the National Library, at the Thirty-third Annual Conference of ACURIL, “The National Information System of Jamaica and the Technological Underpinnings including the Developmental Impact of CDS/ISIS.”; an article by John Aarons, former Executive Director of the NLJ, titled “Coordinating a National Information System: an Expanded Role for the National Library of Jamaica”; and a paper presented to students of the Department of Library Studies by John Aarons in 2003, “The National Library Of Jamaica: The Gateway To The Nation's Information Resources: An Address to Students of the Department of Library and Information Studies, University of the West Indies” .

This paper also examines models of union catalogues with a view to suggesting a model for Jamaica. It finally looks at the main objective of the union catalogue in the context of the conference objective and analyzes it using factors discussed by Professor Fay Durrant in her Inaugural Lecture in February 2005.

## Definitions

The title of this paper raises the question of what is the ‘Jamaican Union Catalogue’ as this phrase in its totality has not been used in the documentation on the topic of the National Information System. I think therefore that it is necessary to spend some time clarifying this usage.

Its use in the title led me to first find a definition for ‘union catalogue’; then to look closely at both the first Plan and the Second Plan published by NACOLADS, and at the other documents mentioned above, to see whether the phrase had been used and, if so, to what it referred.

I also looked at union catalogues of other countries to see to what types of union catalogues were being used. I also consulted IFLA's list of union catalogues to see whether one for Jamaica was included; however, none was listed.

## **Union Catalogue**

According to Reitz, a union catalogue is a "... list of the holdings of all the libraries in a library system, or of all or a portion of the collections of a group of independent libraries, indicating by name and/or location symbol which libraries own at least one copy of each item. When the main purpose of a union catalog is to indicate location, the bibliographic description provided in each entry may be reduced to a minimum, but when it also serves other purposes, description is more complete. The arrangement of a union catalog is normally alphabetical by author or title."

According to Taylor it is "A catalogue that lists, completely or in part, the holdings of more than one library or collection."

A cursory glance at the descriptions of some of the national union catalogues in the IFLA Directory of National Union Catalogues showed that the scope of the catalogues varied. For example, Namibia's union catalogue contained the holdings of the Namibian Government libraries; that of the Netherlands, "materials held by Dutch libraries; COPAC in the UK provides "easy access to the resources of major UK and Irish research library catalogues via a single interface; the British Union Catalogue of Music Periodicals (2nd edition) "provides detailed listings of holdings of music periodicals in UK libraries and some Irish libraries".

One that I found of particular interest was that of New Zealand. It uses both the terms 'union catalogue' and 'national bibliographic database'. I find this interesting as the Second Plan uses these terms synonymously as is discussed later in this paper. *NBD/NUC of New Zealand* is one database with the NUC being a super-set of the NBD. The NUC has the holdings of all libraries and these along with bibliographic records sourced from the Library of Congress, the British Library and National Library of Australia, make up the NBD. (McDermott)

What is common to these is that the union catalogue has the holdings of the libraries within the respective country, not necessarily only national publications or publications of a particular type, though this may be so.

## **Jamaica Union Catalogue**

The Second Plan used the term 'union catalogue'; but was not explicit in the meaning of a union catalogue. In the report of the Working Party for Databanks and Automation in Libraries (36), under a sub-heading 'Cataloguing and Bibliographic Services' there is mention of "The creation of a national union catalogue in machine-readable form which would facilitate the production of catalogue cards and bibliographies" (37). There is another reference in this section under the sub-heading 'Union Cataloguing': "... The creation of a National Union Catalogue" (38).

Another reference is made in the report of the NLJ Working Party (Second Plan 42). It states, under the heading “Collection and dissemination of information on the **nation’s cultural heritage**” (44), (my bold) and under the sub-heading ‘Bibliographic Services’, “Compile and maintain a Bibliographic Data Base (National Union Catalogue) to identify the location of needed information to facilitate the operation of the National Referral Service and the sharing of information resources through inter-lending” (45). The following point under this sub-heading states “Prepare and publish on a regular and continuous basis, the **Jamaica National Bibliography**’, to provide a comprehensive listing of all print and non-print materials produced in Jamaica, about Jamaica or by Jamaicans” (45).

One can surmise that since both the ‘Bibliographic Data Base (National Union Catalogue)’ and the ‘**Jamaica National Bibliography**’ are under a heading which refers to the “nation’s cultural heritage”, the Bibliographic Data Base (National Union Catalogue) would include Jamaican publications only.

John Aarons, Executive Director of the NLJ from 1992 to 2002, stated, in an address to the students at the DLIS, UWI, in 2001 that “It was envisaged that the National Library would create a central database to provide access to the holdings of Jamaican materials in the libraries of the networks which comprised its System. To do this the Library began to build the National Bibliographic Database of Jamaican Publications. This is still being developed and it is being done by copying Jamaican records from the computerized catalogues of special libraries that are using the CDS/ISIS management system for their computerized catalogues”. A few years later he stated that “The National library’s major network project has been the development of the National Bibliographic Database of Jamaican Publications (NBDB) based on the holdings of the Library and the libraries in the sectoral networks” (Aarons. Coordinating 28).

Byron Palmer, former Network Manager at the NLJ, also referred to the database of the NLJ system as the National Bibliographic Database which “is being developed by copying Jamaican records from computerized databases of special libraries ...” (3).

We can conclude from the references in the three papers above and in the Second Plan, that the Union Catalogue is the NBDB, that the records represent the holdings of the NLJ and the sectoral libraries within its system and that “Jamaican Publications” and “Jamaican records” refer to the type of holdings. We can also conclude that the Union Catalogue, aka NBDB, excludes publications that are not Jamaican in origin in the holdings of the contributing libraries. However, when we consider that:

1. The collections of those of the sectoral libraries are valuable information sources that support the work of the parent organizations of the respective libraries and that some of these information sources are published in other countries besides Jamaica.
2. The Plan for the national information system was formulated with a “view to the rationalization of limited resources and the more effective provision of information to all sectors of the society” (Second Plan 2).

then the omission of the non-Jamaican holdings from a union catalogue of the libraries for the decision makers of the country should be reconsidered.

In addition, within the context of the entire NIS, the Jamaican Union Catalogue could have even a wider scope. The organizational framework of the National Information System comprises three central systems, namely, NLJ central database system, JLS central system, and the libraries of the UWI. The second two systems have been developing their bibliographic databases representing holdings of member libraries according to their internal plans. However, they are committed to the objectives of the National Information System and are represented on both policy making and implementing arms of the NIS. The same question could be raised concerning them – why omit their holdings from the union catalogue? The databases of these systems could be also included in the union catalogue so that, indeed, the limited resources could be accessed by all “sectors of the society”.

This could be made possible through a design which would allow each central database to exist as separate databases but have a common interface for users. The design which we have been using is to have a central system into which records are contributed directly and indirectly through uploading. Another design is to have a distributed union catalogue. Philip Hider, Bibliographic Manager, Singapore Integrated Library Automated Services (SILAS), National Library Board, Singapore, in his paper delivered at the IFLA General Conference and Council in Berlin in 2003, explains that “In this model, the local catalogues are linked through their respective servers, probably using Z39.50, while the Z39.50 client searches each catalogue in turn, creating “on the fly” a virtual union catalogue” (2). Hider’s paper also discusses the pros and cons of both systems and he points to the cost of the Z39.50 server as being a possible hindrance to utilizing this model (3).

Hider cites the case of Singapore which changed from a centralized system to a distributed one and examines the challenges which Singapore experienced regarding issues such as different subject headings, different ISBNs and dates for the same item, names not assigned their full authorized heading, edition variations, and similar items not having the same variant title (12-15). Indeed, his paper is titled “The bibliographic advantages of a centralized union catalogue for ILL and resource sharing”. Therefore, admittedly, this type of system has challenges but it would be judicious to explore the feasibility of this model or a similar type of model in the interest of making the resources of all libraries in Jamaica accessible to all sectors of the society as was envisioned in the plan and as is still a relevant imperative.

This may seem a lengthy way of determining what is meant and could be meant by the Jamaica Union Catalogue; but it is necessary to have a common understanding to be able to plan for the future and for participating libraries to have a clear appreciation of their commitments and roles in this regard. This is particularly critical in light of the current information environment in which the concept of access to content is the focus of libraries and digital libraries are being seen as an option by many libraries. It is also critical in light of developments in the cataloguing field, for example the development of a new descriptive cataloguing code, *Resource Description and Access*, which is described as a metadata scheme and which regards the Internet resource as the default format – not the book.

## **Objectives and strategies**

The objective of a union catalogue was for each sectoral network to compile a union list of serials and a union catalogue of monographs held by the respective network libraries/information units for input into the NLJ's database. The strategy was to copy records from the catalogues of the participating libraries.

The strategy is also implied in the achievement which is the creation of databases of monographs, namely, the SECIN database which is a centralized model; the JBIB (originally the NBDB) which has Jamaican records uploaded from contributing school and special libraries, also a centralized model; and the NATCAT which "offers access to the records of the Jamaican and West Indian materials held by the National Library of Jamaica." NATCAT is a catalogue. So there are two union catalogues and one catalogue in the NLJ central system. But, one of the union catalogues, the SECIN database, has Jamaican as well non-Jamaican publications. This points to the need to clarify objectives and strategies.

## **Conference Objective and Factors which impact on access to information**

In this section I will examine the objective of creating a national union catalogue in two ways. First, by looking at it in the context of the conference objective, and secondly, with regards to some points raised by Professor Fay Durrant of the DLIS UWI in her inaugural lecture presented in 2005 at the UWI, Mona.

1. Regarding the conference objective, "Reviewing of the network's provision [of] and access to information in support of national economic, human and social development" I would like to add 'content' after the word 'information' as increasingly access to information content will be the preference of our users who want the ease of searching and accessing content as on the Internet. Providing access to content is also one of the objectives of libraries which are developing digital libraries.

The focus at the time of formulation of the NIS and specifically the union catalogue was on creating bibliographic lists as that is what we do – provide bibliographic lists or surrogate descriptive information of recorded knowledge. Typically, location is indicated but it is the responsibility of the user to 'access' the content subsequently to finding the bibliographic record. Access was perceived in the sense of bibliographic data access primarily, and content access secondarily.

The implications are that we need to review our perception of the functionality of the catalogue generally and the union catalogue specifically. (This is what FRBR did.)

However, developing further on the idea of users expecting to have 'access to content', it would be useful for us to consider some points raised by Professor Fay Durrant of the DLIS UWI in her inaugural lecture, "Factors which have impacted on access to information in the Caribbean from 1980 onwards", presented in 2005 at the UWI, Mona. She looked at some

factors which Borgman<sup>1</sup> identified as influencing “access to information in a networked world”. These are: Content, usability of the content and of the user interface, and connectivity as well as affordability, not named by Borgman.

Before we examine these factors, it is useful for us to recognize the significant change in the meaning of the word *network*.

Reitz’s definition of *network* is:

A group of physically discrete computers interconnected to allow resources to be shared and data exchanged, usually by means of telecommunication links and client/server architecture. Most networks are administered by an operations center that provides assistance to users. The largest "network of networks" in the world is the Internet, allowing users of computers of all types and sizes to communicate in real time. *See also*: CD-ROM network, extranet, intranet, local area network, and wide area network.

Also, two or more organizations engaged in the exchange of information through common communication channels, usually for the purpose of accomplishing shared objectives. When the organizations are libraries, the arrangement is a *library network* (*example*: National Network of Libraries of Medicine).

The implication for us in this regard is that we have to plan with the understanding of the first definition rather than that of the latter which is the one which influenced thinking at the time of planning for the information system. Admittedly, we anticipated a computer network, but the largest of networks, the Internet, was not even imagined.

## **Content**

Returning to the features discussed by Professor Durrant, she states that “The existence and availability of relevant information content is the major factor in access to information” (3). She supports this by pointing to elements pertinent to content such as level and orientation of user, complexity of the topic, relevancy and format. She also points out that some of our students at the DLIS have become “accustomed to textbooks which are linked to websites, which have graphics and sound and now complain that the textbooks in plain text are dull” (3).

- Implications for our union catalogues are that we need to consider providing access to content based on user needs and to include visuals where possible and for the appropriate clientele. The Internet is the resource of first preference as found in research. For example, as reported in “*Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, a report by OCLC Membership”, among other things, it was found that:

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<sup>1</sup> Borgman, Christine L. [From Gutenberg To Global Information Infrastructure :Access to Information in the Networked World](#) . Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003

- Respondents use search engines to begin an information search (84 percent). One percent begins an information search on a library Web site.
- Information consumers use the library but they use the library less and read less since they began using the Internet.
- Ninety percent of respondents are satisfied with their most recent search for information using a search engine.

**Usability**, another feature discussed by Durrant as an important influence on the accessibility of information, refers to the extent to which a user interacts easily with the computer interface. Elements of consistency of navigation and “usability of online catalogues, websites and other products and services” (4) are to be considered. The important point is that our traditional provisions for ‘access points’ such as classification numbers and subject headings need to be reexamined.

- Implications for union catalogues are that we need to look closely at user preferences and what makes it easy for the user to find information. Use of the Internet for access is implied.

**Connectivity**, the third influencing feature, is the ability to connect to another computer or computer system so that users “can access relevant content and functional systems”. Included in this is the “ability of the user to interact with the system” (4). She concludes here that “if access to networks is restricted or non-existent, it limits the user’s ability to interact with information systems, and consequently to access information” (4).

- The implication for union catalogues is that they should provide for connectivity for users not only to local networks but also distant systems. This means that content outside that of the union catalogue would be accessible by the user. Also points to using a something similar to the distributed model for the union catalogue.

**Affordability** of content from the users’ point of view is another factor influencing access to information. Cost of electronic database access may be absorbed by a parent organization and the user may not directly have to pay the fees. Other cost components include the link to the Internet Service Provider, cost of software and hardware and peripherals, telecommunications costs and cost of infrastructure such as requirements for ADSL and wireless.

- Implications for designing our union catalogues in a networked environment are that we need to investigate users’ information seeking behaviours and their level of information literacy to enable them to effectively use the costly databases and accompanying costs for quick and convenient access to the Internet.

## **Conclusion**

Regarding the objectives and strategies for developing the Jamaica Union Catalogue, it has been found that:

1. Further clarification is needed regarding the scope of the Jamaica Union Catalogue so that participating libraries have clearly defined goals and guidelines. Issues of content, usability and connectivity can thus be addressed.
2. The objectives need to be reexamined in the light of the current networked environment so that access to information content is reflected and focus be placed on services and users.
3. The strategies should be changed to meet the current needs of users and to keep in step with the capabilities of the information and communication technologies. Information literacy education, for example, should be included in the strategies.
4. Training for librarians about the new cataloguing code and related topics such as FRBR, FRAD and FAST needs to be done as these can impact on the type of bibliographic description/metadata provided for users in a networked environment.

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