

FOREWORD

Globalization is with us for better or for worse. Our increasing technological and economic interconnectedness allows the world's population to share in benefits such as more rapid economic growth, improvements in living standards, reduction of poverty, increased foreign direct investment, and the peaceful resolution of international political and economic tension. But these benefits are not evident everywhere. Economic or geographic handicaps and in some cases ideological barriers prevent many countries from taking advantage of globalization. These countries tend to get left behind. The negative consequences of globalization are emphasized by a broad anti-globalist or mundialist movement, which cites a range of problems attributed to globalization, for example, the heavy social and economic costs of economic restructuring required to be competitive in the world market, a growing gap in the standard of living between richest and poorest countries, environmental damage, the use of economic power by the rich to protect their industries from competition by poor countries, and the erosion of national cultures and languages. A more frightening downside of globalization is international terrorism, while the recent international credit crisis, in which the effects of bad decisions by US bankers were rapidly exported to other institutions and individuals worldwide, illustrates the dangers of shifting large amounts of money worldwide with the click of a mouse. Globalization presents us with challenges that can best be faced if we are equipped with increased international understanding.

Librarians have a long tradition of internationalism and cooperation across national borders. This has found expression in, for example, international schemes for interlibrary lending and the sharing bibliographic records, international cooperation in the preservation and conservation of library materials, and international digitization programs. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) have played a leading role in many of these international activities. Our interconnectedness, made possible by modern information and communication technologies, facilitates such programs. Globalization opens up new opportunities for cooperation. To seize these opportunities and utilize them for the benefit of libraries and library users everywhere, and to avoid the pitfalls of well-intentioned but badly conceived international programs, librarians need to be well informed about the situations, challenges and values of their colleagues in partner countries. The communication has to be two-way. The time when all new ideas, innovations and standards came from the northern hemisphere, and specifically from the USA, is over. Increasingly we live in a multipolar world, with many sources of insight and influence. This makes global librarianship more complex, challenging and interesting than ever before.

The present book makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the situations and challenges of our colleagues in other countries. This is not the usual potpourri of chapters on various themes in various countries. Not since Miles Jackson's *International handbook of contemporary developments in librarianship*

(1981)¹ has there been such an ambitious attempt to construct a geographically comprehensive and thematically systematic overview. The editor, Ismail Abdullahi, consulted widely, drew up a logical framework, and recruited regional editors and chapter editors to ensure that a coherent overview could take shape, region by region, and within each region, by type of library. This was a big challenge. Africa, for example, counts over fifty countries and it is no simple task to determine the state of the art in each of them, let alone the state of the art for each type of library, and to combine this information into readable chapters. While gaps inevitably remain to be filled, the result is a significant contribution to the literature of international librarianship, which combines richness and diversity of content within the discipline of a systematic framework. It should be of value not only to teachers and students of international librarianship, but also to area studies librarians, librarians involved in running international programs, and any practitioners of our profession who are open to insights that may be gained from other situations and cultures and are willing to learn from the experiences of colleagues all over our shrinking globe.

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¹ Jackson, M.M., (ed.) 1981. *International handbook of contemporary developments in librarianship*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood press.