Theme
Bibliographic tools of Islamic information

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Topic
Taming the Bibliographic Universe: Proposed Bibliographic Centre for the Muslim World
Taming the Bibliographic Universe: Proposed Bibliographic Centre for the Muslim World

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Abstract

Bibliographic control covers activities pertaining to the organization of bibliographic resources that facilitate discovery, management, identification, and access to resources. Much has been discussed on the peculiarities of Islamic information resources that deserve careful considerations. With the changing landscape of information industry today, mainly due to the proliferation of information resources in various formats, and expanding of user communities, the role of bibliographic control becomes more crucial than ever before. How are these changes affecting libraries in Islamic countries?

In January 2008, the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control produced an important report that among other things redefined the concepts of bibliographic control and bibliographic universe. It is envisioned that the future of
bibliographic will be that of collaborative, decentralized, international in scope, and web-based.

Fostering bibliographic cooperation among libraries in Islamic countries can be materialized by having a central agency that addresses issues relating to bibliographic control of Islamic information resources. Based on the recommendations made by the Library of Congress, this paper will provide an overview of how the bibliographic centre can actively serve the library and information communities by: increasing the efficiency of bibliographic production and management; enhancing access to rare, unique, and hidden materials; positioning technology for the future; positioning library community for the future; strengthening the Library and Information Science profession.

**Bibliographic Control in the New Millennium**

Recently, the ‘webification’ of bibliographic universe is making a huge impact in bibliographic control. In 2002, during the Bicentennial Conference on Bibliographic Control for the New Millenium ([www.loc.gov/​catdir/​bibcontrol](http://www.loc.gov/​catdir/​bibcontrol)), much has been reported on the challenges of bibliographic control in the new millennium, particularly on providing effective bibliographic description for access, discovery, and use of networked information resources. More interestingly, the Conference had looked at how relevant are the current tools being used in bibliographic control in the description of digital resources, coming in various forms. The role of traditional tools such as AACR2, LCSH, LCC, and DDC were re-examined in order to fully harness their potentials.
Pursuant to the Conference, in the action plan produced as outcome of the conference, (www.loc.gov/catdir/bibcontrol/actionplan.pdf), six important areas were identified, as follows.

1. Increase the availability of standard records for selected Web resources.
2. Enhance the access to and display of records for selected Web resources across multiple system.
3. Work collaboratively with metadata standards communities to improve bibliographic control of selected Web resources.
4. Develop automated tools for extracting, creating, harvesting and maintaining metadata to improve bibliographic control of selected Web resources.
5. Provide appropriate training/continuing education to improve bibliographic control of selected Web resources.
6. Support research and development on emerging standards and address the challenges of interoperability to improve bibliographic control of selected Web resources.

In essence, the action plan had envisioned a distributed, networked environment where disparate networks of bibliographic databases work together in support of end-users access to and use of information resources.

The shift from highly centralized cataloging model, to one that is iterative, collaborative, and distributed in nature, paints a
new landscape for bibliographic control today. The new paradigm in bibliographic control sees that bibliographic control is no just for catalogers anymore, and cataloging is not just about AACR2 and MARC. The emerging trends towards collaboration between libraries and non-library communities have been made possible with technological advancement.

The Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control released a special report in January 8, 2008. In 2006, the formalized group was charged to study how bibliographic control and other descriptive practices can support the management and access to bibliographic resources in the turbulent age of information technology advancement and proliferation of information resources production. In essence, the Working Group identified that three major principles need to be redefined: bibliographic control, bibliographic universe, and the role of the Library of Congress. The report clearly reported that the U.S. leadership in bibliographic control is to be one that is a collaborative and cooperative in nature between the Library of Congress and other major participants.

Bibliographic control is still and will always be relevant. Its role in the identification, verification, and locating of bibliographic resources becomes more crucial with the proliferation of web-based, networked information resources today.
Bibliographic Centre for the Muslim World

The recent development in bibliographic control will also affect libraries in Islamic countries. In such scenario, a concerted effort from libraries in Islamic countries can be a platform where issues on the bibliographic control of Islamic information resources can be addressed and mutual agreement can be reached on standardizing bibliographic control practices. A bibliographic centre designed to specialize in the bibliographic control of Islamic information resources would be a strategic partner working in collaboration with bigger, international level bodies in charge of bibliographic control such as IFLA, the Library of Congress, and OCLC. The following are among the issues that must be addressed by the proposed centre in ensuring that libraries in Islamic countries are operating in the mainstream of bibliographic control in the new millennium.

- Collaborative environment that of less ‘standard compliance’ to one that is ‘standards interoperability’.
- Adoption of the Resource Discovery and Access (RDA) as international descriptive cataloging standard, replacing AACR2.
- Metadata standards development and interoperability.
- Authority records creation and maintenance.
- Implementing object-oriented modeling of bibliographic content through the proposed IFLA’s Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) framework.
• Classification and vocabulary control.

The recommendations made by Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control can be used as a model to outline the main functions of the bibliographic centre for the Muslim world. The following section discusses how the proposed centre can assist libraries in Islamic countries in the area of bibliographic control of Islamic information resources.

a) *Increase the efficiency of bibliographic production and management*

The creation of quality bibliographic records remains the most important and core business of any bibliographic centre. A strategic plan must be in place as how the activity can be centralized, participated by libraries and other agencies in charge of Islamic information resources. The centre must also have the necessary infrastructure to support sharing of bibliographic records from participating members. This includes collaboration in the area of authority records creation and maintenance for Islamic works. Local practices need to be streamlined and further enhancement need to be made in order to internationalize the practices.

b) *Enhance access to rare, unique, and hidden materials*

The proposed centre can play a role in enhancing the access to rare, unique, and hidden Islamic information resources. Undoubtedly, libraries and information institutions in Islamic countries house heritage of rare, valuable Islamic materials. Digitization of Islamic resources can be deployed as a mechanism to broaden the access to these materials to participating member
countries. The centre can be the referral centre by providing bibliographic information access to the digital collections. However, the centre must take the leading initiative in standardizing the practices of resource description and digitization.

c) Positioning technology for the future

Technology has enhanced the functions of bibliographic databases that they no longer can just provide bibliographic description, but can also be linked to full-text, digital version of bibliographic works. In Malaysia for example, digital versions of rare Islamic works can be found in libraries, museums, archives, etc. In order to allow access and navigation to the disparate databases, the proposed centre would be responsible in identifying suitable and flexible metadata carrier that supports interoperability. The proposed RDA and FRBR, for example have been designed to foster interoperability between standards.

d) Positioning library community for the future

The library community in the Islamic countries must be ready to embrace the future of bibliographic control. A lot has been discussed on the suitability of traditional tools in managing the bibliographic universes. RDA came about upon realizing the need to restructure AACR2 as not only a resource description tool, but also a tool for resource discovery that provides the mechanism to integrate library catalogs with other resource discovery tools. Libraries in Islamic countries, through collaborative research and development, can harness the potential of LCSH, DDC, and LCC for Islamic information resources in the digital age. The peculiarities
of Islamic information resources, combined with the constraints of working with internationally accepted tools has resulted into localization of practices such as in the area of classification and authority control. However, due to lack of promotion, documentation, and collaboration, most of the initiatives are used in isolation.

e) Strengthening the Library and Information Science profession

Human resource development in the area of bibliographic control of Islamic information is and will always be a major contributor in realizing quality bibliographic works and successful bibliographic collaborations. The proposed centre can play a role in preparing the standards for the educational background of catalogers, indexers, etc. Collaboration and networking among LIS educators in Islamic countries must be fostered through formal and informal training and exchange programs. Sharing educational materials on bibliographic control, for example, can be done through web postings. The curriculum of courses related to bibliographic control must look at the activity of bibliographic control as one that relates to knowledge organization in all information communities. The centre can also organize continuing education programs in order to equip catalogers with the latest skills and competencies in bibliographic control.
Conclusion

The changing landscape of the bibliographic universe has set a parallel change in bibliographic control activities. Libraries in Islamic countries can synergize their strength by working cooperatively and collaboratively through a centralized bibliographic centre, specializing in Islamic information resources. The five areas identified by the Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control provide an excellent guide into how the centre can play an active role.
References


