
Introduction: The Purpose, Present Situation and Future of the Parliamentary Library

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This issue of *Library Trends* explores parliamentary libraries in different parts of the world in the past and present and also offers some thoughts about their future. We are grateful for having been given this opportunity to publish the papers presented at the World Library and Information Congress: 75th IFLA General Conference and Assembly, Milan, August 2009. The papers were presented in a joint open session organized by the Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section and the Library History Section. This issue of *Library Trends* also includes two papers on parliamentary libraries in Uganda and Pakistan that were not presented at the Congress. The overall theme of the Congress was "Libraries Create Futures: Building on Cultural Heritage." Within this context, the two organizing sections called for papers on the theme of "Changing Visions: Parliamentary Libraries Past, Present and Future."¹

PARLIAMENTARY/LEGISLATIVE LIBRARIES

Legislative libraries can be seen as special libraries in the narrow sense that they are providing services for a specialized clientele, they differ from many such libraries in that they need to be willing to provide information on the breadth of human knowledge, rather than concentrating on a range of subjects relevant to a specialist clientele. . . . In a nutshell parliament is interested in the whole universe of knowledge.

This is how parliamentary libraries are introduced by Keith Cuninghame in a newly revised edition of *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries* (2009, p. 23).

Parliamentary libraries, like other special types of libraries, differ greatly in size (from one-person libraries to services with hundreds of staff members) as well as in what kind of services they offer. Some operate on very limited resources and others are more generously funded. Most parliaments have a research service as well as a library: these two services

may be part of the same department or may be administratively separate. What they have in common are the clients they serve: the members of parliament, their personal staff, and their institution as a whole. What characterizes the clients is that they work under very tight deadlines. The staff serving them need to provide access to independent, timely, and objective information tailored to their needs and within a very short time frame. Some parliamentary libraries are open to the public on a general basis. Many have services targeted toward schoolchildren and students, while others have a more restricted policy and serve only their internal customers. Ernst Kohl, former chair of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments, divides parliamentary libraries into parliamentary libraries *proper* and *hybrid* parliamentary libraries, a hybrid library being a combination of a parliamentary library and a special or general library serving the public as well as parliamentarians (1996, pp. 141–144).

At the conference “Informing Democracy,” which was a joint initiative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, and IFLA in Geneva 2008, it was stated that

Access to reliable, timely information is essential to the proper functioning of democratic legislatures. . . . parliamentary libraries and research services contribute to the effectiveness of parliament by providing authoritative, independent, non-partisan and relevant information. (Informing Democracy, 2009, p. 7)

Anita Dudina, director of the Information Department at the Saeima (Parliament) of Latvia speaks of the library and research unit as a mediator between the client and the information environment (2008, p. 1).

HISTORY

Many parliamentary libraries have a long history. Some have celebrated major anniversaries in recent years, and there are articles and monographs published on parliamentary library history and development. The Czech parliamentary library celebrated their 150th anniversary in 2009, and the parliamentary librarian Karel Sosna writes the following:

Legislatures created libraries early in the history of nation-building in modern times to meet the need for independent information. The National Assembly library in France in 1796, the U.S. Library of Congress in 1800. Today, nearly every active legislature has a parliamentary library. (2009, p. 197)

Most of Europe's parliamentary libraries were founded in the fifty years following the Congress of Vienna in 1815, when new national and democratic states and subsequently also their parliaments and parliamentary libraries emerged, e.g., the Belgian in 1830, the Portuguese in 1836, the Spanish in 1841, the Greek in 1845 to mention a few. (2009, p. 9)

The papers presented in this issue of *Library Trends* are samples of the history, traditions, and developments that parliamentary libraries in different parts of the world have experienced and the challenges they see ahead.

IFLA SECTION ON LIBRARY AND RESEARCH SERVICES FOR PARLIAMENTS

Librarians and researchers working in parliaments have their own section within IFLA—the Library and Research Services for Parliaments. It was established in 1976 as a separate section within IFLA, with Erik J. Spicer, the parliamentary librarian from Ottawa as the first chair. The section started out with 31 members. In 1979 membership was extended to the African continent and to South America when the South African Library of Parliament, Cape Town, and the Library of Camera dos Deputados, Brasilia, registered for the section. In terms of representation in Asia, Turkey has been a member from the start; and in 1980 the Philippines became the first representative from the northern Pacific region. By 1988 the section had 50 members, and in 2009 this vital section numbered 111 members from more than fifty countries (Kohl, 1989; Sandgrind, 2009).

The primary mission of the section is to promote the role of libraries and research services in helping parliamentarians carry out their legislative functions. In addition, it serves as a forum for librarians and researchers working in legislatures to share best practices on available information and knowledge to parliaments and to support the development of professional competency. It also stresses the value of professional working relations among information specialists—librarians and researchers—and encourages the exchange of ideas among those who serve the information needs of parliamentarians (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2008).

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Parliamentary libraries have established both worldwide and regional associations and working groups. Some have been working very successfully on creating strong networks used for day-to-day activities as well as more strategic issues. To a great extent, this has been achieved because of the similarity of the parliaments concerned. Some of the regional associations are the

- Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Australasia (APLA), a collaborative network of federal and state parliamentary libraries in Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, formally set up 1984;
- Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific;
- Parliamentary Libraries of South East Asia, established in 1986;
- Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Canada (APLIC/ABPAC), established in 1975;
- Parliamentary Libraries of Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), which first met in 1922 and is still a vital network;
- European Centre for Parliamentary Research & Documentation (ECPRD), established in 1977;

- Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA), founded in 1994;
- Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network library working group (APKN), the most recent working group, established in 2009 (Sandgrind, 2009).

Parliamentary libraries in young democracies have been supported in different ways by parliamentary librarians and researchers from different countries. The importance of this is recognized by Anita Dudina (2008), among others, who characterizes this support as a cornerstone that helped build the information system and knowledge-valued environment in the Parliament of Latvia.

CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE

The papers presented in this issue of *Library Trends* are samples of the history, traditions, and developments that parliamentary libraries in different parts of the world have experienced. Many of the papers also address the challenges they see ahead.

The *World e-Parliament Report 2008* underscored the role that libraries and research staff have as early adopters of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and as important contributors to advancing their broader use in parliaments. The report was a joint product of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and was prepared as part of the work of the Global Center for ICT in Parliament. According to the report, 70 percent of chambers and parliaments responding to a survey conducted worldwide have automated systems for managing library resources. In low-income countries in particular, the survey found that librarians represent an important resource for ICT support.

The explosion of information made available by the Internet makes the role of parliamentary libraries and research services more, not less important, as busy parliamentarians need people to filter information for them and to do so in a timely, accurate, and politically neutral way. Understanding and responding to the changing needs of parliamentarians is vital. As the Parliamentary Librarian of Canada, William Young, noted in his opening remarks at the twenty-fourth annual IFLA pre-conference of Library and Research Services for Parliaments in 2008:

In an age characterized by advances in technology that are more rapid and persistent than ever before, we are faced with the challenges of responding to the changing needs of our client legislatures. Our role as knowledge providers increasingly has much to do with connections as it does with collections.

NOTES

We thank IFLA for allowing us to take the papers presented at the Milan session and add value to them. We also thank the publisher of *Library Trends*, Johns Hopkins University Press, for permitting this particular issue to be freely available through IDEALS, the

institutional repository of the journal's home organization, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (<http://www.ideals.illinois.edu/>).

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