UNIVERSAL AVAILABILITY OF PUBLICATIONS:
PRACTICAL NEED AND PRESENT TRENDS

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Describes the practical need of worldwide availability of publications and illustrates the present trends in Universal Availability of Publications (=UAP) using international lending statistics.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, the father of library science in India, in his famous Five Laws of Library Science[1] implicitly rather than explicitly indicated the need of availability of publications to every user irrespective of the fact where the user is and where the document is available? The first, second and third Laws of Library Science (viz. Books are for Use; Every reader his/her book; Every book its reader) point out very clearly that all published materials should be made available to anyone, wherever and whenever it is wanted. The idea put forward by Ranganathan 45 years back was mooted in a transformed and magnified form by Maurice B Line[2] in 1977. The term Universal Availability of Publications means: "that every published document, whenever and wherever published should be available to anyone who wants it more or less where he wants it – its presence in a reference collection a long way from the users is not enough"[3].

The need of UAP was realized after the concept of UBC (Universal Bibliographic Control) was introduced by Dorothy Anderson[4]. UBC aims at recording the bibliographic information in a standard form, for all publications all over the world. The recording of world's publications is not enough in itself unless the recorded publications are made available to one who wants it more or less where he wants it. Thus, UBC and UAP are complimentary to each other, when the former tries to locate a document, the latter provides the means of its availability.

The UAP programme, initiated few years ago by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is still in its early stages but with the interest and support not only of IFLA, but also of UNESCO, there is now every hope of its practical progress.

PRACTICAL NEED OF UAP

Quite recently, the improved bibliographical services have provided greater awareness of publications which in-turn has resulted into heavy demands by the users. For most of the readers, libraries are the only means of access to most publications. But the libraries have their own constraints. A library cannot buy beyond its limited budget. Moreover, the rapidly dwindling space in the library is a matter of great concern. In fact, what libraries generally acquire, is a mere fraction of what their users require. Therefore, the only way to meet both the ends is to call upon the resources of other libraries through inter-library lending. Now, as no library can be self-sufficient in publications, so no country. The only answer to the problem seems to be Universal Availability of Publications. The UAP programme aims to improve availability at all levels, from the local to the international, and at all stages from the publications of new material to the retention of last copy, both by positive action and by the removal of barriers. It is, therefore, important to examine the existing national inter-lending systems and how worldwide availability can be achieved. This, in fact, has been the subject of study[5,6] carried out by M.B. Line, Stephen Vickers and Brian Kefford under the sponsorship of UNESCO.
UAP IN RELATION TO DEVELOPED, DEVELOPING AND SMALLER DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Apparently, it seems that since developed countries have more published output than developing countries, the developed countries will always be on the giving end and the developing countries on the receiving end. However, it will be interesting to note that the situation is reverse. For example, in a developed country, out of three million inter-library loan requests, only 2% constituting 60,000 requests, have to be sent abroad. In contrast to this, in a developing country, total inter-lending demand is, for example 50,000 of which 50% are met from within the country. The remaining 25,000 demands have to be satisfied from abroad. Moreover, quite a good number of unsatisfied demands in developing countries are likely to be from the publications of developing countries which are difficult to obtain because of poor distribution facilities.

Developing countries primarily suffer from inadequate local machinery for interlibrary lending. Not only this, the cost of securing items from other countries may discourage the demands. If the supply of documents from developed to developing countries can be economised, it will generate the demand enormously and will enable the readers to obtain the literature they want and will thus contribute to the research and development of the country.

Between the two extremes of large developed countries and developing countries, there is a third category of a small developed countries eg. Bulgaria, Norway whose publications are generally in their own language.

In a UAP programme the problem is twofold. They have to be supplied with publications of other countries in their own language. Similarly, their own publications may be important to some other countries. In such cases, improvement in international transfer of documents could make an enormous difference to the ability of readers to obtain the literature required by them and consequently to research and development.

PRESENT TRENDS IN WORLDWIDE PROVISION OF PUBLICATIONS

There has been an unprecedented rise in international lending during last decade. It appears to have been growing at a rate of between 5% to 10% a year in the 1970s[7]. A growth rate midway between these two figures represents a doubling every decade. This increase in the growth of international lending is due to the following factors:

(i) Rise in world’s published output
(ii) Rise in the cost of publications
(iii) Increasing awareness of publications
(iv) Improvement in national interlending systems.

(i) Rise in world’s published output

The present era, particularly the later half of this century has seen a tremendous increase in the published output. The enormity of the growth can be gauged from a survey made by Allen Kent who states “For every 60 second period during the day and night- Saturdays and Sundays included, it is estimated that 2000 pages of books, newspapers or reports will have been published somewhere in the world. If you attempted to keep fully informed of everything going on in the world - through reading - you would fall behind and estimated 1,051,200,000 pages every solid year you would devote to reading ... . This problem faces industrialists, lawyers, military planners, scientists, engineers in keeping abreast of what is published in their own specialised field.”

Only in the field of science and technology, it is estimated that 1.985 million papers in 1960, 3.78 million papers in 1970 and 5.9 million papers in 1980 were published in the world[8].

(ii) Rise in the cost of publications

Not only the world’s published output has increased enormously but the cost of publications has also gone up equally sharply in recent years. This has outstripped the purchasing capacity of libraries throughout the world. Therefore, libraries are unable to fulfil most of the demands of the users.
UNIVERSAL AVAILABILITY OF PUBLICATIONS

(iii) Increasing awareness of publications

As the number of publications are increasing throughout the world, the awareness about them is also increasing accordingly. Thanks to the remarkable contribution of UNESCO through UBC, which aims at ensuring that bibliographical records, in standard form, are provided for publications all over the world. It is clear that awareness of publications generates demands.

(iv) Improvement in national interlending systems

As mentioned above, awareness of publications through improved bibliographic control generates heavy demands on libraries which have limited budget. The only alternative to satisfy the demands of the users is to use the collections of other libraries. Most of the demands are satisfied by national interlending which are to be improved to provide fuller information to users. Just as a poor interlending system discourages demand, so a good one generates demand. In such a situation, although most of the demands are met from within the country, still a small fraction of the unsatisfied demands which are sent abroad, make a good proportion of requests. The experience of U.K. illustrates that between 1962/63 and 1980/81, 18 years in which the national interlending system improved beyond all recognition, the number of requests sent abroad increased by a factor of 4 to 21,500'[9].

STUDIES PERTAINING TO INTERNATIONAL LENDING

In order to understand the present trends in worldwide availability of publications, it will be important to study the volume of international lending traffic, satisfaction rate, speed of supply, effect of distance on supply time. To undertake such studies is difficult because obtaining facts and figures related to international lending is a real problem. Some of the difficulties involved in such studies are given below:-

(i) The figures obtained may relate to different periods.

(ii) The figures may refer only to the national library or to the major university library, which may or may not be the only institution involved in international lending within a country.

(iii) The figures may represent a cumulation of statistics received from a number of libraries within a country, sometimes virtually complete and sometimes partial.

However, IFLA office for international lending has carried out 3 statistical surveys in 1973[10], 1977[11], and 1979[12]. The following discussion is based on the above mentioned surveys and the statistics of British Library Lending Division[13].

Volume of international lending traffic

The statistics relating to volume of requests are of great interest. It was observed in 1973 survey that at least 13 out of 44 countries which responded, sent abroad more than 1000 requests/year and of these, at least 6 sent more than 10,000 requests a year (Table 1). This figure is however, difficult to estimate for countries having decentralised systems e.g. USA & Canada. The figures given by most of the countries included returns from their national libraries only. Countries capable of giving virtually complete national statistics are exceptional. They include G.D.R., the Netherlands and the UK. A close look to the tables given here, shows that there has been a steady increase in the volume of international lending traffic. According to M.B. Line “The total volume of inter-library loan requests sent between countries is estimated to be between 900,000 and 1 million a year ... and ... is growing at a rate of between 5% and 10% a year”[14].

The single most noticeable statistics concerns the very substantial increase in the number of requests received at the British Library Lending Division which rose from 159,141 in 1973 to 377,410 in 1976, and in 1979 to 544,383.

Satisfaction rate

Satisfaction rate for requests received from abroad were studied but accurate picture was not available as requests received by a national centre are to be forwarded to other libraries which may not necessarily inform the centre of the success or failure of the request. Similarly study of the satisfaction rates for requests sent abroad faces the same difficulties, because
Table 1
Volume of international lending traffic and satisfaction rate
(taken from IFLA'S first survey in 1973)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Sent</th>
<th>Requests sent abroad</th>
<th>Satisfaction Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>Photocopies</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.D.R.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7,613</td>
<td>5,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2,445</td>
<td>1,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>9,473</td>
<td>6,260</td>
<td>1,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>16,881</td>
<td>6,543</td>
<td>4,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Volume of international lending traffic and satisfaction rate
(taken from IFLA'S second survey in 1977)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Sent</th>
<th>Requests sent abroad</th>
<th>Satisfaction Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>Photocopies</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>2,004</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>9,845</td>
<td>5,286</td>
<td>1,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>18,196</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The national center may be responsible for sending the requests but may or may not be informed of the outcome of individual transactions. In the 1973's survey, only 4 countries reported a success rate of over 90% and only 2 less than 50%. The result of the second survey done in 1977 has shown that 6 out of a total of 47 countries which responded, noted a satisfaction level of less than 70% for requests sent abroad and 10 countries noted a satisfaction level of less than 70% for requests received from abroad at the other end of the scale, 9 countries sending requests abroad experienced a satisfaction level above 90% while 12 countries satisfaction gave more than 90%.

Satisfaction rates from international requests vary between 60% and 95% for both requesting and supplying countries. However, it will be interesting to note that the countries with highest satisfaction rates may not be the
best suppliers. A country with an exceptionally good reputation may attract an unusual number of difficult requests and have a much lower satisfaction rate than a country that is used only when it is certain that a publication in question is available.

**Speed of supply**

Speed of supply of requests was studied only in the first IFLA survey. Responses received were found to be most incomplete as the respondents found it difficult to answer. However, it was found that the time taken to satisfy requests sent abroad mostly fell between one month and two months; it may be as little as 2 to 3 weeks or as much as 6 months. The figures supplied on average speed of satisfaction are only approximate. They include the time taken for the request to reach the supplying library, and for the loan to reach the requesting library. On the other hand, the time taken to satisfy request received from abroad covers only the time between the receipt of the request and the despatch of the requested item. The figures received suggest that this period rarely exceeds 2 weeks. Three weeks is not an excessive time to allow for air mail transit in both directions. However, if the time taken ranges between 4-7 weeks or more, it may be concluded that requests and items sent must be taking longer time in the post than is necessary, or else other causes of delay must be involved. It is also possible that supplying libraries may be using surface mail instead of air mail. The longer time taken in the supply of items may be due to the fact that the document requested is not available at the national centre and is being obtained from other libraries. Delay may be caused in custom formalities. A study[15] of the experience of British Library Lending Division with the requests it sent abroad in 1980 revealed a median time of 38 days between requesting and receipt.

**Effect of distance on supply time**

Study of the effect of distance on supply time, is an important issue in international lending because it may lead to determine the future pattern of worldwide availability of publications. Two special studies[16] were undertaken, the first examined the time taken for requests to reach the British Library Lending Division from various parts of the world, while the second study involved dummy packets and parcels which were sent between British Council Offices in six Asian cities viz. New Delhi (India), Lahore (Pakistan), Dacca (Bangladesh), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Bangkok (Thailand) and Tokyo (Japan).

The results of the studies showed that distance is unrelated to the time of transmission. The fastest time recorded was between New Delhi and Tokyo while the slowest time was between New Delhi and Lahore although the distance between the former cities is far more than the distance between the later cities. It was further observed that air travel times between major cities anywhere in the world do not normally exceed 30 hours, even when it is necessary to change planes. Libraries in the town without air links will be getting publications more slowly.

The above mentioned studies clearly indicate that it is the postal services and not the distance between supplying and receiving countries which cause delay in the transmission of documents.

**CONCLUSION**

Due to the exponential growth of knowledge, it is very difficult for the scientists and researchers to know what is published where? Universal Bibliographical Control provides the answer to this problem by recording in a standard form world's published output. Providing a faster supply of references will be of no use, in fact it will be more frustrating if the documents to which researchers referred could not be obtained. UAP in fact, aims at the widest possible availability of published materials to anyone irrespective of the fact where the document is available and where a user is located? Thus the practical need of UAP cannot be over-emphasised. Though the concept is not very old yet considerable progress has been made due to the organized efforts of IFLA and UNESCO. In the beginning UAP was considered like a wild goose chase. M.B. Line remarks "it is not an all or nothing concept"[17]. To this author UAP is a never ending process and any progress made in the availability of publications will take it a step forward. The present trends which have
shown tremendous increase in international lending in recent past seem to have justified author's views.

REFERENCES
3. Line, Maurice B: Barriers on the road to the UAP. Library Association Record 1978, 80(11).
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.