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## Curricula Development in Library Science: A Nation-wide Core Curriculum?

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### ABSTRACT

Curriculum development is a time-consuming process and often interminable. Pursuing the idea of creation a nationwide core curriculum is one opportunity to develop a curriculum in library and information science (LIS). It can be supposed that a project like this can be the initial point stimulating and encouraging the widest possible discussion between different educational environments. Furthermore, it can strengthen the cooperation and collaboration between LIS educational institutions. The European project in 2005 has shown that there are more differences than similarities in the European LIS curriculum [Kajberg, Lørring 2005]. But nonetheless the discussion about a core curriculum can be an opportunity and a challenge for universities, students and libraries / companies in many countries around the world. The key question is how to create reliable framework conditions that will speed up the procedure of developing a nation-wide common core curriculum? A second question is: what consequences to be drawn if it appears that there are only a few similarities in the curricula or the universities show little willingness to modify the curricula in a study reform process?. The European project will be reflected and the own long time experience in curriculum development will be contributed. A nation-wide or international core curriculum seems to be inappropriate for a direct transfer into the participating institutes or universities. But finally, it would ensure greater cooperation and collaboration, thereby multiplying the chances of long-term cooperations and enhancing reputation of universities among employers, e.g. libraries.

**Keywords:** Curriculum; Core curriculum; Study reform; Library and Information Science (LIS); LIS educational institutions; Bologna process

### INTRODUCTION

The European universities and universities of applied sciences were undergoing vital changes partly as a result of the Bologna Declaration which aims at implementing an unified and interchangeable course system all over Europe (47 countries). As a rule, the former study programmes were step-by-step replaced with a 3-year Bachelor programme and a 2-year Master programme complemented by a post-graduate PhD or doctorate degree. As of 2010, Europe can look back on more than ten years of a worldwide unprecedented unique reform process. "Bologna represents the most comprehensive and profound higher education reform of the last decades. It challenges European universities and universities of applied sciences at a time where the percentage of the population seeking higher education degrees is increasing continuously, the higher education institutions are taking on ever more diverse and demanding tasks, while simultaneously, however, the budget and especially state financing cannot keep up pace with the growing demands." [Zervakis 2010]. But most of the European universities managed their study reform process by themselves under considerable time pressure regardless of a nation-wide or European dimension.

#### **Bologna Process**

The main contents of the Bologna process are:

- Introduction of a system of easily understandable and comparable Bachelor's and Master's degrees.
- Definition of a framework of comparable and compatible with higher education qualifications at national and / or European level (qualifications framework).
- Promotion of the European dimension in higher education.
- Implementation of an European credit transfer system (ECTS).
- Promotion of mobility through suitable measures (e.g. cooperation between higher education institutions, joint or double degrees, removal of obstacles to student and teacher mobility).

- European cooperation in the field of quality assurance: Promotion of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level as well as implementation of standards and guidelines for quality.
- Integrating the principles of the Bologna process in a concept of lifelong learning by creating flexible higher education study courses as well as by recognizing skills and knowledge acquired in a non-university environment.
- Enhancing the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area in the global context. The European Higher Education Area wants to remain attractive and open to people from all over the world.
- Focussing on vocational qualifications / employability of graduates. Higher education institutions must provide a broad knowledge base and prepare students for the labour market [Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2010].

Therefore a core curriculum seems to be an adequate instrument to fulfill these high requirements and standards. Study programmes respecting the principles of the Bologna Declaration are characterized by three levels beginning with a broad education at the Bachelor level and a more specialized education combined with research at the top of the three-level structure (figure 1).

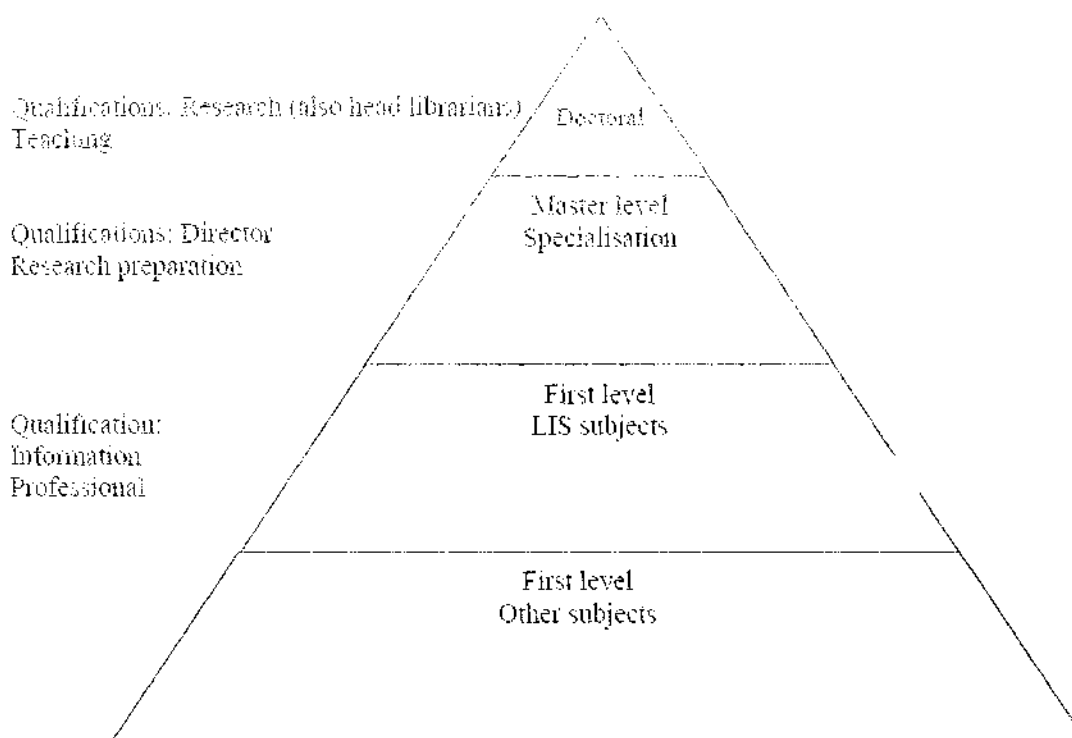


Figure 1: Structure of LIS programmes [Assumpció et al. 2005]

### **Core Curriculum**

The need for a core curriculum (or core curricula) must be driven from its (or their) function as a planning tool for developing new courses and study degrees. The aim of such a fundamental paper is stimulating the discussion process within the LIS community and providing orientation for future and intra-institutional planning processes. A core curriculum will be defined as the minimum required time devoted to core subjects and study areas within the compulsory curriculum [OECD 2003]. A core curriculum gives a general overview of LIS, and consists of the minimal, most important knowledge necessary to apply LIS in practise. Therefore the core curriculum implies that all students have a uniform body of knowledge in different subjects and, presumably such a curriculum will produce educated and responsible graduates for science and practise in LIS.

### **Qualifications in a Changing Job Outline of Librarians and Information Specialists**

In future the different fields of librarianship (i.e. public, academic, and special libraries) will have a minor importance in education and practise in Europe. Some traditional skills e.g. consideration of books as objects (ancient manuscripts, incunables, bookbinding) lose their importance. Other competencies like IT or information literacy become more and more important. The result is a growing convergence of information economy, documentation, and librarianship. And, librarians will no longer be employed exclusive in libraries, they will have excellent career prospects in the fields of knowledge management, information research, information design, web technology, online editing etc. too.

What factors will determine a career of an information specialist or librarian in future?

- *The employers:* e.g. libraries, enterprises, other institutions.
- *The fields of work:* e.g. management, indexing, information research.
- *The skills:* e.g. pedagogical education, cultural and social skills, language proficiency.

The curricula can no longer be attached only to the potential employers (i.e. libraries). They have to orientate on the different fields of work and the required working qualifications. The main advantages are a lower dependence on the job market in the different fields of work and a higher flexibility of the applicants for job. These are fundamental changes for universities and particularly for potential employers, especially libraries [Georgy 2009].

Some new fields must be part of a modern and particularly promising curriculum: e.g. knowledge management and competitive intelligence as well as change management and innovation management. Cultural and social skills like rhetoric, presentation, project and time management should be integrated part of other subjects and not be taught separately.

### **European Joint Core Curriculum in Library and Information Science**

One central objective of the project "European Joint Core Curriculum in Library and Information Science" was to –examine the idea and relevance of a core curriculum in the context of European LIS education" and to manifest the curricula developments within the changes determined by the Bologna process throughout Europe [Kajberg, Lørring 2005]. The project should be the initial point stimulating and qualifying the debate between different educational environments and strengthening the cooperation between European LIS educational institutions. Twelve working groups – three to five core members including a group moderator – covered a broad field of relevant LIS subjects defined by the organizers:

1. (Meta-level) LIS curriculum in general
2. Cultural heritage and digitization of the cultural heritage
3. Information literacy and learning
4. Information seeking and information retrieval
5. The information society: Barriers to the free access to information
6. Knowledge management
7. Knowledge organization
8. The library in the multi-cultural information society
9. Library and society in a historical perspective
10. Mediation of culture in an European context
11. Practice and theory: Placements and practical training in libraries and other information agencies
12. Library management and promotion.

Main aim and challenge of these twelve virtual working groups was to elaborate the possibilities developing a European common core curriculum within a few months. The workshop leaders initiated the work with some questions and theses covering the different aspects and perspectives of the topic, i. e.:

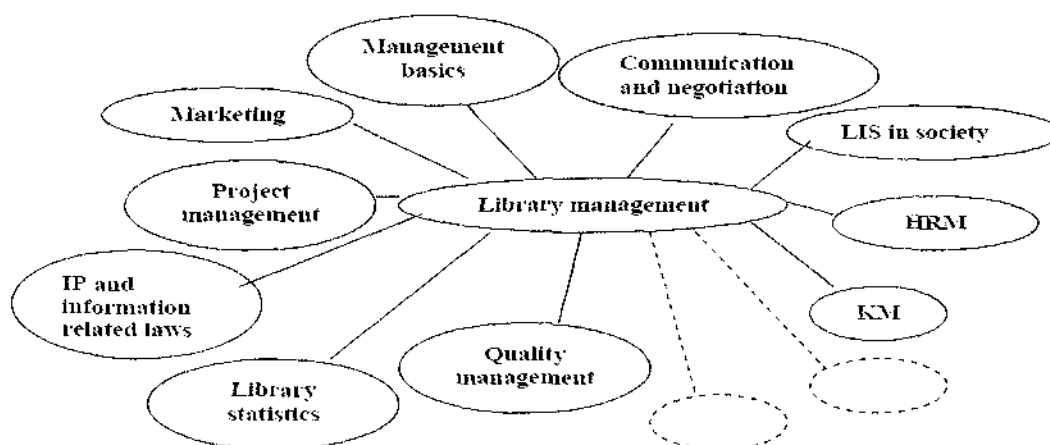
- The European dimension.
- The theme in the context of the international universe of the LIS discipline.
- European theme or not? Is the theme essential for all LIS educational programmes in Europe?
- Should the theme be a part of a European LIS core curriculum?
- Different theoretical and curricular approaches to the theme in various parts of the European LIS education world?

- Different views on the theme and its components in different parts of Europe?

About 150 colleagues in the field of LIS education participated in these virtual discussions with hundreds of contributions and comments. Then in summer 2005 circa 50 LIS experts – the core members of the virtual working groups – met in Copenhagen (Denmark) for a labor-intensive two-day workshop discussing the possibilities of the European curriculum development in LIS. Each of the 12 workshop groups had to explore a sequence of general questions:

- How is the range of typical LIS domains generally reflected in a LIS school curriculum and how should it be reflected?
- Are there special national reasons why some curriculum elements have a particularly prominent place in LIS courses?
- What is the place of the individual LIS curriculum subject in a core curriculum developed from a European perspective?
- What part of the LIS subject could be determined to fall within a core curriculum for LIS?
- In what way could the individual LIS subject be related to the general objectives of LIS courses? In what way could the LIS domain contribute to promoting equivalency, comparability and transparency of LIS courses?
- Which kind of European networks should be built among LIS teachers and researchers in a specific LIS subfield?
- What is the place of a specific LIS domain in joint periods of study abroad?
- Which kind of research areas and research approaches could be defined for each of the LIS domains listed below? And how could research be advanced in these areas?

During the teamwork it became clear that thinking, structures, and contents of LIS courses differ considerably from one LIS education institution to the other in Europe. Two examples: First the topic of group 12 was entitled “Library management and promotion”, but after intensive discussions of the group members during the workshop in Copenhagen they decided to formulate a more generic title “Library management”. This title covers a wide range of knowledge and practical skills which is expected from every information professional in functions of ever changing library and informationservice organizations. Figure 2 shows a brainstormed cluster of management and related subjects (result of group twelve) that might be relevant and should be part of a LIS curriculum.



**Figure 2: Mind-map of the library management educational discipline [Georgy et al. 2005]**

This cluster must be incomplete, because in practise the content will be determined by a lot of factors like individual education system structures, country specific political frameworks, historical traditions, and national accreditation and evaluation rules etc. The implementation of historical and archival studies in LIS study degrees is very typical for country specific education systems. Both sciences developed independently as professional areas each other in Germany. To sum up, in Germany archive study programmes and LIS study programmes with one

exception are offered by different universities and schools. Therefore it is almost impossible to integrate archive science in LIS education in Germany although some themes are important for both programmes, e.g. long-term archiving of books and digital data or restoration of media. Therefore the German National Library (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek) initiated a network: "Network of expertise in long-term storage of digital resources - NESTOR". "The objective of the project was to create a competence network of long-term archival storage and long-term availability of digital resources in Germany. The competence network should create structures, which ensure that digital resources in Germany are archived on a long-term basis, are secured and are made available for use---[Deutsche Nationalbibliothek 2009]. Libraries, archives, museums, leading experts, and students from different disciplines work together in this project to ensure the long-term preservation and accessibility of digital sources.

Another example: "Mediation of Culture in a European Context" [Fronander et al. 2005]. During the discussions of group 10 it became clear that the Scandinavian group members -- majority of this group -- had only little difficulty in understanding the meaning of the word "mediation" but nearly everybody outside of Scandinavia has difficulty in using and understanding this term. Therefore intensive meta level discussions about the term "mediation" in- and outside of this workshop group were necessary. As a result of these discussions the Scandinavian group members learnt that the Scandinavian countries obviously have a special / different comprehension about the word mediation in the context "mediation of culture". "But what [they] mean by "mediation" is to a great extent construed around that kind of activities, which the library performs as an institution in addition to the task of keeping a media collection and making it available to its users. These activities include the presentation of cultural events to new audiences, facilitating library visitors' encounter with different kinds of cultural activities and artefacts, reader development and so on. Expressed in a more general manner, one can say that it is about serving as a meeting place in local social, cultural and political life" [Fronander et al. 2005].

In these two days teachers and professors hold many joint discussions as well as informal talks about terms like "culture" and country-specific characteristics in LIS education based on the elementary political structure of the own country. The result of these discussions was the following definition: "Mediation of culture might be understood as the main task of the library as a cultural centre in the local community as well as an activity pertaining to specific types of material in the library. It relates to different rationales of cultural policy, cultural theory, considerations on cultural and artistic quality, but also to technical measures and pedagogical instruments."

The result of this conference was an expansion, intensification, continuation of communication and better understanding among colleagues, practical experts, and politicians up to the present. Now European education and research institutions on the one side and practitioners on the other hand have to discuss the future of European LIS education together [Georgy 2006].

### ***A Survey of Library and Information Science Schools in Europe***

In June 2005 an electronic questionnaire was sent to all LIS schools in Europe. Around 50 from 200 institutions answered this survey. It was one goal to explore which themes and subject areas are central part of the different curricula.

**Table 1: Degree of Overlap of Ten Curricular Themes 2005 [Larsen 2005]**

Information seeking and information retrieval	50	100%
Library management and promotion	48	96%
Knowledge management	43	86%
Knowledge organisation	41	82%
Information literacy and learning	38	76%
Library and society in a historical perspective	33	66%
The information society: Barriers to the free access to information	32	64%
Cultural heritage and digitisation of the cultural heritage	31	62%
The library in the multi-cultural information society: International and intercultural communication	21	42%
Mediation of culture in a special European context	13	26%
Total	50	

The table shows that "information seeking and information retrieval" and "library management" are fundamental subjects in almost every LIS school. But themes like "cultural heritage" or "international and intercultural communication" were included only in circa half of the curricula.

To further explore the amount of priority currently given to LIS school subject areas, respondents were then asked to state which of the ten LIS subject areas listed they would regard as core subjects given in-depth coverage in their LIS curricula.

**Table 2: LIS Themes Ranked As Core Subject Areas in LIS School Curricula [Larsen 2005]**

Library management and promotion	81%
Knowledge organisation	66%
Information seeking and information retrieval	100%
Knowledge management	49%
Information literacy and learning	45%
The information society: Barriers to the free access to information	45%
Library and society in a historical perspective	38%
Cultural heritage and digitalisation of the cultural heritage	19%
The library in the multi-cultural information society: International and intercultural communication	15%
Mediation of culture in a special European context	6%

2011 these tables possibly would show another degree of coverage and some new fields should be part of modern LIS education. For example, in the table above one misses information technology skills (IT) like web development, systems development and systems applications. These themes become more and more relevant in LIS education and most of the LIS schools have integrated these topics in the curricula. One can only conclude that the development of a core curriculum is a dynamic process and it really makes sense that all German study programmes have to be accredited in a 5-year-cycle.

### ***Impact and Objectives of a Core Curriculum***

Kajberg and Lørring [2005] formulated in the publication *European Curriculum Reflections on Library and Information Science Education* the impact and objectives of a core curriculum which can be used as arguments for national or trans-national core curricula or study reform processes. The main points are that a core curriculum is an improved basis for developing strategies and activities in study reform processes, and it strengthens the cooperation and networks among LIS schools and universities in teaching and research. The main objectives of a project creating a core curriculum should be:

- self-reflection of all institutions taking part in this process,
- looking for an overview of all different study programmes - regional or international,
- creating more transparency about content of courses with the same name at different universities,
- identifying regional and / or national characteristics of the curricula and analyzing the reasons for that,
- reviewing the current state of curriculum development and study reform in LIS schools and universities,
- identifying potential partners for cooperations in teaching and research,
- creating optimized conditions and possibilities for teacher and student exchange,
- identifying trends in learning and teaching in the LIS sector, and
- establishing training programmes for practitioners at a very high level performed by LIS professionals.

### ***Process Elaborating a Core Curriculum***

Characteristics of the European project were that many of the professors and teachers were not personally known among themselves till the starting point of this project. But all persons were and are specialists in their theme with a strong involvement in their area of teaching and research. Most of them had functions or experience in academic self administration (e.g. dean, degree course or study reform responsible person). In virtual groups the members discussed a lot of questions (see above) without the need to come to a concrete conclusion. Nowadays, in times of social communities and Web 2.0 tools this virtual discussions should be much more easier. Important is to build up panel discussions to allow comprehensive and unrestricted statements of opinion in the first project phase. But, as a supervisor of a group, one needs to be as clear as possible about possible goals. It is like a team building process needed to be monitored. Group members possess facts, opinions and ideas about the topic and the problems to be solved. The quality of a final outcome normally is a function of the ability of the group members to uncover information and knowledge. The virtual discussion phase should typically take up to six months.

Furthermore a two- or three-day meeting with the core participants of the virtual discussion panels seems to be indispensable all given the opportunity to get to know each other personally. Only personal contacts can be the starting point of long-term contacts and cooperations between teachers and institutions.

A carefully prepared report should be a key element and result of the process. Then the core curriculum process is to be instrumental in helping to take decisions in medium- and long-range planning of own study programmes or national strategies in planning the LIS education.



## CONCLUSION

A nationwide or international draft of a core curriculum is the result of a very intensive communication process and it creates more transparency about LIS study programmes. The aim of such a fundamental paper is stimulating the process of discussions within LIS and providing orientation for future and intra-institutional planning processes. This includes, of course, if the result of such a project are obligatory for all universities offering LIS courses, but normally the results could only be an informal frame of reference including key competences.

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