Middle East Library Partnership Project

Project Report and Findings

http://melib.web.unc.edu

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MELA 2015, Denver, CO
Project outline

**Goals:** to develop a better understanding of opportunities for and obstacles to international collaboration between libraries in Arab Countries and the United States

**Timeline:** July 2014 - June 2015

**Funding:** grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s Scholarly Communications program

**Research avenues:**

- Survey of library professionals and educators in Arab countries
- Panel discussions with leading library scholars and professionals
- Investigation of online presence of libraries in Arab countries
Survey

257 total responses from:

1. Librarians, archivists, other professionals (58%)
2. LIS educators (25%)
3. Library administrators and para-professionals

Focus on:

Awareness of international collaboration projects:
Training programs -- 57.9%

Need for international collaboration: 96.5%

Benefits to institutions and people: Consortial agreements -- 41.8%, sharing ideas -- 27.2%, professional development/training -- 21.4%

Obstacles to collaboration: Philosophical or cultural differences, and administrative, or bureaucratic barriers – about 75%
Panel discussions

Delegates:
Leaders from MELA, AFLI, SLA-AGC

Meetings:
MELA 2014, November, Washington, D.C.
SLA-AGC 2015, March, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.

Issues under discussion:
Disaster management
Resource sharing
Cataloging standards
Availability of catalog data
Training programs
Partnerships with older libraries
Library leadership
Library online presence

**Sample:** 831 libraries in 17 countries

32.5% had some web presence (accessible library or institutional site)

15.2% had an accessible online catalog

**Findings:**

Larger libraries more likely to have web presence

National and university libraries most likely to be online

Holdings in majority of libraries are unknowable without physical access
Recommendations
Collaboration of professional organizations

Strengthen ties between different groups

- Encourage sustained collaboration between MELA, AFLI, and SLA-AGC
- Work with national library associations
- Listserv and social media cross-pollination
- Invited panels at other associations’ meetings
Library leadership conferences

Encourage regional and international conversations

- Meetings of library directors
- Encourage natural collaborations
- Regular meetings of national librarians and leaders in library associations
- Help in addressing common needs
Disaster management plans

Support libraries and librarians in conflict zones

- Research to study damage from recent and ongoing conflicts
- Professional training
- Establish protocols for mitigating damages to collections and infrastructure
Interlibrary catalogs

Support ongoing work to improve interoperability

- Lend support to ongoing collaboration between AUC and OCLC
- Create opportunities to deploy online catalogs in libraries that lack them
- Integrate new catalogs with major interlibrary catalogs
Interlibrary loan

Increase portability of regional knowledge

- Digital loan agreements to overcome obstacles in shipping and delivery
- Investigate legal frameworks around copyright to protect intellectual property and extend access
Internships and exchange programs

Provide international and cross-cultural training opportunities

- Embed professionals in Middle East collections at U.S. universities with library schools / iSchools
- Practical experience and theoretical training for interns
- Explore possible bilateral exchange opportunities
- Increase international personal and professional connections for practitioners
Training workshops

Provide on-site training opportunities

- Create training modules for state-of-the-art procedures and practices
- In-person training modules archived online for broader access
- Funding should provide for low- and no-cost options for participants
Reference network

Facilitate international reference queries

- Clearinghouse for information
- Build experience with collaboration
- Build network incrementally as demand and interest grows
- Eventually include translation of queries to facilitate interactions with international colleagues lacking the Arabic or English skills for direct communication
Thank you

Please visit [http://melib.web.unc.edu](http://melib.web.unc.edu) for project information and report.