



The ARLIS/NA Environmental Scan:
Surveying the Art Library Landscape in 2005

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Beginning in the 1990s, ARLIS/NA established the creation of strategic plans to provide direction and establish priorities for the society. The plan currently being created will cover a three year period, 2006-2009. Once again, a member survey will be performed in order to determine an insight into what the members of ARLIS/NA see as the goals and priorities for the society. Unique to this Strategic Plan process is the addition of the Environmental Scan 2005 that will provide a snapshot of the climate in which ARLIS/NA exists and the issues that surround the society. Members of the Strategic Plan Task Force have determined that information on the environment in which ARLIS/NA operates will be vital to a successful Strategic Plan for 2006-2009.

The Environmental Scan 2005 falls into four parts: a literature search on the “scanning” process; a scan of issues presented in venues such as the annual conferences from 2000-2005, conference surveys, and on ARLIS-L; a scan of hot topics from publications such as *Art Documentation* and *Museum News*; and a scan of allied organizations such as ACRL and VRA. The latter was greatly assisted by timely publications such as the *Association of College and Research Libraries Environmental Scan 2003*, the *Visual Resources Association Strategic Plan 2003-2008*, and of course *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition*.

The first step in any environmental scan is to analyze the terrain and identify the landscapes and patterns that develop in the data, i.e. “pattern recognition.”¹ Patterns developed in the ARLIS/NA material almost immediately and stayed true throughout most of the process. What was reassuring was to see that we are not alone; many of our concerns were those of our colleagues in other organizations. It also became clear from even a cursory review of the issues confronting art librarians that what drives the parent organizations in which we work is what drives the art library. On the whole, we are operating in the same library terrain, albeit with some of our own unique challenges. With this in mind, it was not difficult to identify our “landscapes” and to see how they had changed since the last Strategic Plan of 2000-2005.

Five landscapes emerged from the environment surrounding and including ARLIS/NA: 1) the Professional landscape; 2) the Collections landscape; 3) the Visual Resources landscape; 4) the Museum Library landscape; and 5) the Academic Library landscape. Do we see challenges in these landscapes? Yes; some would even see pitfalls

on the horizon. For the most part, however, the members of ARLIS/NA view these landscapes as places of opportunity as well as challenge. Within each of these five landscapes, trends can be identified which may impact the future of many organizations, including ARLIS/NA. The landscapes form the conceptual idea, but within each landscape there are functional areas where trends are apparent. For example, within the Visual Resources landscape, the management of digital content is both a function and a trend of the future. Each landscape contains a number of trends that have implications for art librarianship.

The Professional Landscape

Trends

- Attracting new librarians to the field
- Collaboration with MLS programs
- Diversifying the membership
- Affiliation with other allied organizations
- Developing subject expertise
- Management skills in art librarianship
- Seeking life-long learning

In 2000, we were interested in the graying of our population and how to enhance the status of art and visual resource librarianship (Pittsburgh 2000). In this concern, we were not far off from our colleagues in other library disciplines. The 2003 ACRL Environmental Scan cited the movement toward retirement of its members as a factor in what it termed “generational change” within associations.² Associations have become more interested in recruitment of new members and many are tailoring their efforts to the interests of younger librarians. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) suggests generational marketing to all members as an effective strategy. Since the Pittsburgh conference, the interest in retirement issues within ARLIS/NA has given way to a proactive search for the librarians of the new millennium and our own version of generational marketing. We are interested in partnerships with MLS programs and introducing art librarianship into library schools (Houston 2005). The search for new members is also part of an increasing concern for diversity within the membership. The diversity momentum in ARLIS/NA, building on the successful Diversity Forum (Baltimore 2003), echoes trends in other library organizations.³

Collaboration is the keyword for library organizations in the 21st century and may be the answer to the increasing competition among organizations for the smaller number of library school graduates. ARLIS/NA has a history of affiliation with the Visual Resources Association (VRA) and has created liaisons to other groups such as the American Libraries Association (ALA).⁴ The trend for close collaboration in library associations has made such overtures even more important. ACRL has realized this and flatly asserts that associations with similar missions must collaborate to broker services and get what they need.⁵

The status and very nature of art librarianship is changing as librarians are called upon to have more than subject and service expertise. Subject expertise is not new to art librarianship and the trend in librarianship towards recognition of subject specialty should

be welcomed by most of our membership. The subjects we manage may now include performing arts, visual resources, and humanities as well as non-traditional areas of the fine arts and management. Good management skills and budget experience are vital in an era of shrinking economic support for collections and services in all types of art libraries. The trend is for the art librarian to be self-sufficient as well as a subject resource, thus the need for life-long learning opportunities for the art professional. This trend towards continued learning among professionals is evident in our conference panels. In Pittsburgh 2000, we had sixteen informational panels; by New York 2004, that number had increased to twenty-four. Art professionals clearly have more to teach each other.

Implications

- Need to present the unique qualities that the society can offer
- Make art librarianship an appealing profession
- Increase outreach to diverse populations
- More joint meetings and collaboration with affiliate organizations
- Evolution of the society structure to address new issues
- Provide more post-MLS learning opportunities for the membership
- Deliver more web-based learning and a better web presence
- Become less conference centered

The Collections Landscape

Trends

- Unique Collections
- Artists Books and Files
- Digital Image Collections
- Digital Archival Collections
- Aggregate vendors and Approval plans

Collections have always figured prominently in ARLIS/NA literature and the goal of a fine core collection, as defined by our institutions, curricula, and users, is important to all members of the society (Los Angeles 2001). Digital innovation has caused us to stop and analyze what we mean by a good collection and how we should obtain it. For example, artists' books and ephemera have become a huge interest for art librarians and a debate continues about their care and collection as art objects. Art libraries have become home to more and more special collections that provide unique content for digitization projects. We are particularly interested in maintaining our archival collections, including artists' files, architectural archives, and cultural heritage collections.⁶ The trend to develop and digitize unique collections within art libraries is here to stay.

Digital projects have proliferated over the last five years creating a new side to the traditional concept of collections. Figuring most prominently are the digital image collections which have come to the forefront including those contained in ARTstor (New York 2004). In 2000, we were thinking about digital collections and new ways to share cataloguing and metadata. In 2005, we have digital collections and are striving to manage and preserve content and develop resources. The digital environment is upon us,

and there is no longer an option but to address the impact of new technology. The remaining question is how to use the technology. In our acceptance, even embrace, of the Digital Age we are leading a trend that can be found among our colleagues in other types of libraries. Art professionals are engaged at many levels in what OCLC calls “bringing structure to unstructured data,”⁷ and many of the collections that we administer are more available to the public as a result of digital production and delivery of content.

The Collections Landscape is quite driven by the economics of building and maintaining a collection, be it print or digital. Art librarians have been very interested in the new age of aggregate buying over the last five years. The use of approval plans and consortia have become more the norm for art collections. Vendor licensing and vendor relations (Houston 2005) figure in our conference panels and workshops. Museum libraries have explored collaborative collections with their museums in some areas, particularly with artists’ books (Baltimore 2003). The increasing demand for digital images and the purchase of digital content are driving forces in collection management in art libraries today. The trend towards aggregate vendors and digital content purchase has changed much of the landscape for Collections in the last five years, and we must plan for it to be part of our Collections future.

Implications

- Maintaining collections will continue to be a large part of what we do as art librarians
- Develop society structures to explore collections and digital content issues
- Membership’s embrace of the Digital Age
- Continued training in digital project management
- Collaboration with other colleagues on digital content issues
- Renewed interest in shared software and data structure
- Respond to issues of delivery, instruction, and service impact for the Digital Age

The Visual Resource Landscape

Trends

- Digitizing images
- Online Art resources
- Shared cataloguing
- Image databases
- Metadata standards

As art librarians and visual resource curators, we are the people of the image. We continue to have a primary role in the provision of and access to visual material. In this mission, we are joined by the visual resource professionals who manage collections and deliver the image. It is a natural conclusion that our goals and objectives will interweave. Whether the visual resource is housed in a library or in a department, the boundaries are blurring with increased use of the “virtual collection” of digital images. Visual resources

and images have always been an integral part of our annual conferences with a culmination in the joint conference with the Visual Resources Association (St. Louis 2002). The digitization of image collections and their delivery to the public is perhaps the bridge between many organizations that share an interest in online art resources. The recent rise of ARTstor as a player in this field brings together the expertise of many types of art professionals as well as technology experts. It is fair to say that collaboration between visual resource professionals and art librarians is here to stay. In many ways, this is the collaboration we seek in the world of online art resources. The trend for much of art research to be done online suggests that information professionals in the arts will find it necessary to work together to inform their patrons.

Cataloguing, particularly the evolving world of subject cataloguing, has been a mainstay of ARLIS/NA discussions for many years. Vocabularies and descriptive subject cataloguing have stressed the uniqueness of cataloguing art objects and cultures (Baltimore 2003). Shared cataloguing and training more versatile cataloguers are recent emerging issues (New York 2004). The idea of cataloguing images and creating the appropriate metadata is a shared interest for different types of art professionals. Exploring the use of MARC, VRA Core, Getty Vocabularies and other standards, and now CCO are topics on several listserves. The trend towards shared cataloguing ventures and the creation of databases for digital libraries will bring together professionals from different types of backgrounds. Metadata and subject analysis involve the expertise of both the art librarian and the visual resource professional.

Implications

- Cataloguing issues will continue to be a vital part of our discussions
- The need for a shared cataloguing utility for images
- Digitization of collections
- Integration of local and licensed resources
- Discussions on metadata for all collections
- Collaboration between ARLIS/NA and VRA professionals
- Closer association between library and department collections

The Museum Library Landscape

Trends

- Issues for Museums are issues for their libraries
- Collaboration between museums and libraries
- Documenting cultural heritage
- Solo librarians and smaller libraries
- Automation

The Museum Landscape is perhaps the one most driven by the parent organization and the challenges affecting it. Museum libraries are most often enclosed by their museum. The Association of American Museums (AAM) has identified several strategies that will guide the plans of museum directors in the coming year. Large art museums are going ahead with building projects without secure funding as museums are finding a need

to present a public face. Nevertheless, museum professionals feel underappreciated and that they are victims of poor communication. Upfront, the critical issues for AAM are increasing public awareness and educating the public on the value of the museum.⁸ Art librarians working in a museum library are concerned about their visibility and their value to the organization, however, most report a positive reflection on their job. Financial concerns, increased by the cost of online resources and the lack of collections space, are the reality for museum librarians.⁹ The trend for art museum librarians is more involvement in fundraising and strategic planning with the museum organization to increase visibility for the library (Baltimore 2003). Collaborative collections that involve acquisition by the museum curator and maintenance by the librarian, such as artists' books and archives, may hold a key to the visibility of the library. The trend towards an increase in protecting cultural heritage should also produce a healthy respect for the museum library as one of the sources of expertise in archival technology.

The term "solo librarian" is particularly applicable to many small museum libraries. The concerns of being everything to everyone and the very real issue of burnout have come up in several discussions on museum libraries. Museum librarians consider their primary clientele the curators and staff of the museum, making them turn inward with their services.¹⁰ Depending on to whom the library director reports, museum libraries may lie within the Education Department or directly under the Museum Director. The library may not even have an independent web presence. If the new public awareness campaigns are successful, not only will the money come in, but the outside patron will start to come in also. In a library with a small staff often relying heavily on volunteers, this can be quite a challenge. The trend for museum libraries, like their parent organizations, will be to become more visible and busier.

Automation has been an overriding concern of museum library discussions at ARLIS/NA conferences the past few years (Los Angeles 2001, Baltimore 2003). It ties directly into two other concerns, financial needs and reaching out to the public. In a study of museum libraries done in 2003, less than half those libraries surveyed had an OPAC.¹¹ Automation and online services have remained an important issue for museum librarians. The trend towards collaboration, perhaps in this case internally within the organization, could be helpful in furthering the cause of automation in museum libraries.

Implications

- More visibility and public awareness of museum library services
- Provide more venues for museum issues at the annual conferences and on the website
- More mentoring of new librarians interested in museum libraries
- A support system for solo librarians
- Collaboration among museum librarians would encourage better access to online services
- Shared systems for museum libraries

The Academic Library Landscape

Trends

- Librarians as Teachers
- Information and Visual Literacy
- Diverse learners
- Web-based reference
- Specialized subject resources
- Issues for Academic libraries

Academic librarians in all disciplines have been questioning their traditional roles in the past few years, and ARLIS/NA members are no exception. Five years ago, we were looking for search tools and strategies to make effective use of the web (Pittsburgh 2000). Today we have moved to specialized resources and information literacy (Houston 2005). One clear pattern has emerged at the annual conferences and that is our interest in instruction. “Librarians as teachers” has become a theme at the last four conferences, just as information literacy and visual literacy have become a standard of our discussions. The ACRL Environmental Scan points to a similar trend in the academic libraries of which we are a part. ACRL members want recognition for their role in the educational process and want support for information literacy acknowledged as a core value in their strategic plan.¹² Accountability for student progress at colleges and universities has also challenged academics to see research in a new light. Librarians are increasingly seeing themselves in a new role as the educators of researchers, and the faculty response is encouraging.¹³ The trend towards shared courseware and collaboration with faculty in the librarian’s new role as educator should produce a second benefit for the professional as her/his status is acknowledged. More academic librarians will take on the challenge of instruction as demand increases.

Just as teaching has become a more important part of our jobs, subject expertise has become a more important part of our teaching. We have always been interested in specialized resources, but now it has become vital that we know how to access a plethora of online and print resources to help students research in the arts. We are still evaluating web sites, but now we are also searching through databases on a myriad of topics once judged peripheral to art research. As we enter the research world as partners with faculty and students, we are expected to know the subject and to be able to work with faculty as colleagues. The trend is for art librarians to master online searching and to be familiar with all types of resources on the subject. Much has been made in library literature of the position of the librarian in the new millennium. What is left for the librarian if Google is all there is? The answer lies both in expertise and the willingness to put it into context for the patron.¹⁴

Users are comfortable with and expect everything to be accessible on the web. We must take instruction to the web and see that space as a viable classroom.¹⁵ Web presence also allows the librarian to “take it to the streets”, for instance, take instruction to a design studio to assist and instruct students who otherwise would not come into the library. Diverse learners are often in diverse locations, and art librarians must seek them out. Web-based instruction and help with online resources offer the opportunity to reach the learner or the faculty member who doesn’t have time for the library. The trend to develop teaching strategies that meet the goals of information literacy may be furthered by using the web as a core communication tool.

Implications

- Increase in the number of teaching librarians
- Mentors for new art librarians interested in information literacy and teaching
- Create more and more novel web-based teaching
- Archive our work and make it available for our colleagues
- Structure of the organization needs to adapt to accommodate academic professional interests, such as teaching and collections
- Increased conference sessions on specialized art resources
- The annual conference must become a learning experience that continues on the web

Conclusion

An environmental scan is about assessing the present and recent past for trends and implications for the future. The areas outlined above indicate that ARLIS/NA is a vital, energized organization experiencing many of the same challenges and opportunities as our colleagues in other similar organizations. What we make of our challenges and how we respond is our future. The 2006-9 ARLIS/NA Strategic Plan will consider the information revealed in the ARLIS/NA Environmental Scan 2005 as well as the direct input provided by the membership via the web survey. The Plan will articulate our collective strategic and organizational goals and priorities for the next three years.

¹ *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc., 2004) 1.

² *Association of College and Research Libraries Environmental Scan 2003* (<http://www.ala.org/ACRLtemplate.cfm?Section=whitepapers&Template=/MembersOnly.cfm&ContentFileID=16234>), January 5, 2005, 4.

³ "By 2025, the term 'minority' may be almost obsolete." *ACRL Environmental Scan 2003*, 8.

⁴ "The indivisibility of art librarianship revisited," *Art Documentation* (2003) 22, 2, 4-7.

⁵ *ACRL Environmental Scan 2003*, 44.

⁶ For just one of many such examples, see Jae Jennifer Rossman and Jennifer Weintraub, "Digitization of Book Arts Ephemera in the Arts of the Book Collection," *Art Documentation* (2003) 22, 2, 16-19.

⁷ *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan*, 35.

⁸ Jeffrey N. Rudolph, "From the Chair," *Museum News* (July/August 2004) 83, 4, 71.

⁹ Joan Benedetti, "A Survey of Small Art Museum Libraries," *Art Documentation* (2003) 22, 2, 37.

¹⁰ Benedetti, 34.

¹¹ Catherine Jansen, "Art Museum Libraries; Automation and Services," *Art Documentation* (2003) 22, 1, 22.

¹² *ACRL Environmental Scan*, 13.

¹³ Lucie Wall Stylianopoulos, "It's all in the company you keep: library skills credit courses in the Art Library," *Art Documentation* (2003) 22, 1, 31.

¹⁴ Brian Kenney, "OCLC to library community: time to think differently," *Library Journal* (March 1, 2004) 129, 4, 16.

¹⁵ *The 2003 OCLC Environmental Scan*, 68.