INFORMATION SERVICES AND FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCHERS: COUNTRY REPORT*

by

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ABSTRAK

Kertas kerja ini membincangkan peranan perpustakaan dalam menyokong infrastruktur pembangunan maklumat yang diperlukan oleh penyelidik dan saintis sosial di dalam usaha mereka memenuhi aspirasi kerajaan menjadikan Malaysia negara yang maju sepenuhnya menjelang tahun 2020. Penulis cuba menyingkap secara ringkas senario pembangunan penyelidikan sains sosial di Malaysia bermula dari tahun 1949 di mana Universiti Malaya mula ditubuhkan sehingga tahun 70an di mana tertubuhnya universiti-universiti yang lain yang giat menjalankan kajian-kajian dalam bidang ini bagi mewujudkan kerajaan dan agensi-agensi tertentu. Seterusnya sumber-sumber maklumat yang banyak tersimpan di perpustakaan khususnya, pengibaran akta-akta perpustakaan, penggunaan komputer diperpustakaan, perkongsian maklumat dan penubuhan rangkaian maklumat sains sosial adalah antara isu-isu yang dibincangkan oleh penulis.

INTRODUCTION

Under the Sixth Malaysia Plan, 1991-95, it is stated that the objective of the library development programme is to "inculcate and promote greater development of the reading habit among Malaysians. This is with a view of developing a knowledgeable and informed society, as a part of the overall national goal of developing quality citizens". Underneath that very deceptively simplistic statement of the objective of library development, the role that libraries has to actually play is tremendous.

Their direction has to be in line with national policies as clearly outlined in the Sixth Malaysia Plan. Library information facilities and services should respond to the National Policy on Library

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and Information Services, the National Book Policy, the National Science and Technology Policy, Industrial Technology Development Plan to name a few. Social Science research activities presumably centre within the boundaries of the National Development Policy. And presumably libraries must cater for the needs of the social science researchers.

**Development of Social Science Research in Malaysia - a brief scenario**

The development of social sciences in Malaysia was coincidental with colonial rule. The patterns of research then had to be in accordance with the demands of the colonial administrators. Researches that were carried out were not directed to the development of the local population but instead were dictated by the needs of the colonial set-up, to provide data and information about the peoples, their customs, languages and cultures which were considered crucial to efficient management. Problems related to social change brought about by the British themselves were not addressed. Most of the writings and findings if not all, were conducted by the administrators of the British civil service.

In any case, researchers dedicated to social science research activities were scarce. Attachments to organizations or institutions for the purpose of research was an unknown feature. This was acceptable as even education and training of social scientists at the time was noticeably absent. The first local university was established only in 1949, namely the University of Malaya located in Singapore. It was perceived as unimportant then that social science research had a role to play or that it was a basis for the formulation and implementation of policies. However, in the early years following independence and in the subsequent decades, there was a slight difference and development in the social science research activities. But the "research culture" that was to take shape was undeniably a reflection of practices experienced before independence hitherto inherited as a norm. The ideology of the colonial masters was clearly seen in the theoretical and philosophical suppositions of researches conducted. And whatever built-in prejudices that were once in force became difficult to change.

During the early years after independence, policy makers and bureaucrats alike were slow to realize the importance of the social science discipline in national development. Science and technology were disciplines perceived as important to enhance development and if at all social science was considered, it was only economics. Although social science was taught at university level, very little was done in terms of teaching research in social science, except to fulfill departments’ graduation exercise requirements. If there was any research done towards development, it was either by government or government-sponsored organizations.

There was a noticeable change however in the seventies with the establishment of more universities, significantly the Science University, Pulau Pinang and the National University in Kuala Lumpur. The Science University had full fledged disciplines in their own rights. The Centre for Policy Research was established at USM which undertook researches for both government and other agencies. In a sense, researches were carried out based on national needs, besides contributing to the academic development of social science teaching and research programs. It was the trend in the seventies therefore, that it was the universities rather than government that became the centre where researches were carried out. Activities grew in response to nationalistic demands as well as the economic demand for trained manpower.

**Sources of Social Science Information**

The scope of social science is very wide and varied. Regardless of its stages of development
between the developed and developing countries and regardless of its research orientation, social science plays a major role in fashioning societies. But research will remain research or study if the findings are not utilized by those who need them.

The objective of the Malaysian National Policy on Library and Information Services aims at the provision and progressive improvement of library facilities and services in order to contribute effectively to national development and provide in particular, effective support for:

a. the policy formulation and decision making process  
b. planning, research and development activity  
c. the educational process  
d. the intellectual development of the people, their economic activity and the fulfilment of their cultural and recreational needs.

Libraries, particularly those in social science institutions should acquire all materials in whatever format, be it monographs, serials, research reports microforms or other media to be kept, managed and systematically documented for easy access to those who need them.

Under the provision of the Deposit of Library Materials Act 1986, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia receives 5 copies of all publications published in Malaysia, for the purpose of preservation and reference. Materials here are designated print as well as non-print. Perpustakaan Negara also acquires materials through purchase, gifts and exchange.

In 1987 Perpustakaan Negara conducted a survey to determine the subject strength of library collections. The result of this survey was published in the Panduan Kekukuhan Koleksi Perpustakaan which is the directory of library resources in Malaysia, indicating subject coverage. Several libraries are identified as "social science" libraries. The purpose of the directory is to assist librarians and information professionals identify the subject strength of libraries for the purposes of resource sharing and inter-library loan. In the 1987 edition, 110 libraries were listed. For the same purpose, the directory was updated in 1991 with an additional 65 libraries/information centres listed. Simple entries were provided indicating subject strength, availability of special collection, original form available for loan and materials not allowed for loan. To expedite inter-library loan, the name of the person in-charge was also indicated. In the 1987 edition, out of the 110 libraries listed, it was found that 74 libraries contained social science collections, while in the 1991 edition out of 175, there are 88 with social science collections.

Most libraries publish reference tools in one form or another to disseminate information about their collection. This may include the catalogue, bibliographies, indexes and abstracts. For example, to find out about materials published locally, the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia publishes on a quarterly basis the Malaysian National Bibliography. This is a listing of all materials received under the Deposit of Library Materials Act 1986. For easy access of journal articles, conference papers and newspaper articles, the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia publishes the Malaysian Periodicals Index, the Index to Conferences and the Newspaper Index respectively. These bibliographic records are now available online to users. At the same time, other libraries also undertake to inform users of their collections in the form of new acquisitions lists and selected subject bibliographies. SDI and Current Awareness Services are common practices amongst libraries.

Use of Computers

The use of computers is now a common feature amongst Malaysian libraries. It is also an
accepted fact that libraries are using and will continue to use different systems. For example, there are now 9 libraries using VTLS (Virginia Tech Library System), 2 using DOBIS/L1BIS, 12 using Dynix, 5 using Columbia Library System, 4 using SISPUKOM, 5 using TechLib not discounting those using software such as CDS/ISIS. Regardless of the system used, bibliographic records are now accessible online. Some special libraries have also created databases, but on a more modest scale using microcomputers.

In 1986, the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia conducted a survey, the results of which were published in the Directory of Databases: a directory of institutional databases. This directory was an attempt to list databases available in libraries in the public sector, the statutory bodies as well as the private sector. It was an ambitious project, but it gave us an idea what was available. There were not many databases available, as computerisation was just catching on in the public sector. And private companies were not so ready to reveal what they had.

More specifically in 1992, the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia undertook yet another survey particularly on social science databases. The purpose of this survey was to find out databases available amongst the social science institutions identified and the results to be published in a directory and distributed. 56 institutions were identified and questionnaire sent. To date, only 17 responded.

The survey required names of databases, information about the type of database, i.e. whether they are catalogues, indexes, directories, statistics or others. The software applications and the hardware platform to run the application were found to be useful features.

**Resource Sharing and Document Delivery**

The availability of databases online or manual is important to libraries in terms of inter-library loan. In June 1989 the Document Delivery System was launched with the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia as the coordinator. At the time, 126 libraries signed the memorandum of understanding whereby member libraries agree to loan materials either in the original form or photocopy to those who need them for their users. The Document Delivery System has been expedited with the use of the electronic mail, called TELEMAIL introduced by the Syarikat Telekom. On a trial basis, the DDS form has been successfully built into TELEMAIL for use between the members. For libraries that do not own a microcomputer, but has a telex machine, requests can be made through the telex, or at the very least the telephone, or the ordinary postal service.

Other services available to researchers are databases on CD-ROM. Since 1988, the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia has produced a list of CD-ROM databases available in institutions using the CD-ROM. This list is updated quarterly and circulated to selected libraries and others on request.

The Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia and a handful of university libraries, namely the University Of Malaya, Agricultural University and the Science University subscribe to DIALOG, an international database, to supplement research needs. DIALOG contains more than 170 million records online, covering a variety of subjects. Since the searches require telecommunication charges, users are charged a minimal fee for every search done.

**Social Science Information Network**

Under the Sixth Malaysia Plan and future Malaysia Five Year Plans, planning the networking of libraries will be undertaken, and has in fact already taken-off. A Malaysia National Bibliographic Network in now in the process under the distributed network environment. This is taking into consideration
that libraries have now developed their own databases using different computer systems.

There is a plan to facilitate the development of special libraries and specialised information centres in the ministries, Federal Government Departments, Research Institutions and private corporations to become specialised centres of excellence in related subject areas to form part of the national information system.

In the first phase of the networking plan, linkages will be between libraries using the same software application. The date, the libraries at the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the National Productivity Centre already have access to the Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia databases, using the dial-up line via modem.

Although the first phase of the National Bibliographic networking stipulated linkages between similar system, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia entertains requests by non-VTLS users to access its databases.

**CONCLUSION**

The National Development Policy formulated by the Malaysian government aims to make Malaysia become a fully developed nation by the year 2020. To achieve this, there must be a balanced development in order to establish a more united and just society based on the principle of growth within the context of a rapidly growing economy. Taking off from this, social scientists and researchers have a multitude of tasks to fulfill if the aspirations of the government are to be successfully met and achieved. And needless to say, in order to support this endeavor, libraries play a major role in the development of the information infrastructure.

Currently, facilities and services for the purpose of social science researches are relatively adequate in Malaysia, although these will continue to be developed and improved.