Libraries and a "Better Life for All": The politics, processes, and promises of the South African *LIS Transformation Charter*

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Abstract

The rhetoric of public librarianship includes many ringing claims for the role of libraries in democracy; and, on the twenty-first anniversary of democracy in South Africa, it is an opportune moment to examine the rather confusing fortunes of libraries since 1994. The library and information services (LIS) profession portrays libraries as agents of development and social transformation; yet, since 2009, more than twenty South African libraries have been destroyed in social protests. This paper reports on the work of the authors of the *LIS Transformation Charter*, which after a start-stop-start process of two phases over six years was delivered to the government in 2014. The paper analyzes the political and professional forces that influenced the charter-writing processes. The two fundamental arguments of the charter are that access to information, and thus to libraries, is a fundamental justiciable human right, both as a so-called freedom right and as an instrument of other economic, social, and cultural rights; and that transformation will depend on "ecosystems" thinking whereby the various subsectors collaborate to ensure seamless services and the equity of provision. The paper argues that the final *LIS Transformation Charter* maps a path for a transformed and integrated library system that has meaning for all sectors of South African society.

Introduction

There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.[1] —Andrew Carnegie

It seems apt to begin this paper with these words from Andrew Carnegie, whose belief in the power of libraries has, over many years, hugely benefited South Africa. The rhetoric of public librarianship includes many similar ringing claims for the role of libraries in democracy; they have been described as "beacons of democracy" (Brown, 2004, p. 169), "active agents of democracy" (Kranich, 2013, p. 17), "democratic hothouses" (Madsen, 2009, p. 10), and "gateways to democracy" (Walker, 2011, n.p.). To the American Library Association (ALA), libraries are the "cornerstones" of democracy (ALA, 2001, n.p.), implying that without them democracies would

collapse. More cautious voices, however, warn against a too simplistic, positive linking of public libraries and democracy (see, for example, Ignatow et al. [2012], pp. 68–69). Surely, Carnegie's description of public libraries as egalitarian spaces for all is questionable in light of the fact that in South Africa and much of the world, they serve a privileged minority. The irrelevance of libraries to the everyday concerns of most South Africans might well explain the spate of library burnings in the past few years (Lor, 2014).

It has been twenty-one years since the advent of democracy in South Africa, and now is an opportune moment to examine the confusing fortunes of the country's libraries. Some of this confusion has arisen from the lack of clarity over the governance of public libraries across the three tiers of government: national, provincial, and local. Schedule 5 (part A) of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa assigned the responsibility for public libraries to the nine provinces, thus disrupting long-standing agreements between the provinces and local authorities. Many of the nine provinces failed to allocate funds for their constitutional mandate, resulting in "public libraries being left 'in limbo' with no clear institutional home." This situation is not yet resolved, although a pragmatic solution has been negotiated in several municipalities whereby provinces "assign" their mandate (with accompanying funds) to those local authorities that have the capacity to run their libraries (South Africa, Department of Arts and Culture, 2013, p. ii).

After years of neglect and decline, since 2008 public libraries have received large injections of funds in two sets of grants from government in apparent recognition of their developmental role, but the libraries are barely mentioned in the major government blueprint, the *National Development Plan* (*NDP*) (South Africa, National Planning Commission, 2012). Many new libraries have been built; but at the same time more than twenty have been burned down in the last few years in violent, so-called service-delivery protests. We have had a series of new school curricula, designed to redress past inequities and equip our school-leavers with the skills required for South Africa to enter the global knowledge economy. Yet, despite years of advocacy from the LIS profession, we have had no accompanying action to build a school library system that might address the curriculum's need for resources and the low literacy levels prevailing in our schools. Researchers agree that the evidence for a crisis in education is compelling: "Most South African pupils cannot read, write and compute at grade-appropriate levels, with large proportions being functionally illiterate and innumerate" (Spaull, 2013, p. 3).

Given the newness of South Africa's democracy, these contradictions must provoke questions among South African librarians, such as *h*as democracy invigorated our LIS? What contribution have librarians made to our young democracy? How could they be more representative of our diverse society? These are formidable questions, but the aim of this paper is to begin to explore them from the vantage point of our

work in the last few years on the *LIS Transformation Charter*, which was released in 2014.

In his speech to Parliament in 1994 to mark his first hundred days in office as president, Nelson Mandela described the government's Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) as an "all-encompassing process of transforming society in its totality to ensure a better life for all" (Mandela, 1994). The imperative to "transform" has dominated South African public discourse ever since 1994 and has generated a number of transformation or empowerment charters across all sectors. Not all have been well-received, however, as a perusal of the online discussion threads soon reveals. For example, Mawson (2013) calls the information and communications technology (ICT) charter, legislated into effect in 2012, a "big fat fail" and argues that the lack of an oversight body is the chief reason. In spite of agreement that an ICT council would be established to oversee implementation of the charter, this body did not materialize.

As Roux (2002, p. 419) points out, transformation entails "the creation of a completely new paradigm, embracing change in behavior, mind-sets, structures, systems, competencies and outputs." We argue that the *LIS Transformation Charter* holds the promise of a new era in which libraries fulfill their potential as agents of social change and transformation. The charter offers a vision of how the LIS profession might contribute more vigorously to the "better life for all" that Mandela envisaged in 1994. One of the fundamental principles of the charter is that access to libraries is a constitutional mandate—implied by sections 16 and 32 of the Bill of Rights, which deal with the rights to freedom of expression and access to information (ATI) (Constitution, 1996). However, in looking to the future, we heed Dick's (2014, p. 101) warning: "A charter cannot transform library and information services without political champions, public pressure, norms and standards, legislation, and a transformed mind-set."

Libraries as the "Cornerstones" of Democracy?
The social injustice of "information poverty" cuts off certain groups from the social and economic mainstream, reducing them to the status of second-class citizens (Britz, 2004). The mere provision of physical access is not the solution. The 2009 Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy identified three aspects of information poverty, among the young, the poor, and people in rural areas of the United States, to be addressed by libraries: unequal access to broadband, uneven literacy levels, and unequal participation in civic society. Mandela's phrase "a better life" (quoted above) suggests the role of LIS in an equitable, democratic society. In South Africa, as elsewhere, there is agreement that constitutional democracy provides an enabling environment for socioeconomic development. However, there is also agreement that, despite the socioeconomic rights delineated in the Constitution, they have meant little to the majority of

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citizens (Kamga & Heleba, 2012); South Africa is still one of the most unequal countries in the world (Chitiga, Sekyere, & Tsoanamatsie, 2015).

Section 32 of South Africa's Bill of Rights (Constitution, 1996) guarantees the right to free ATI. Its wording applies not only to information held by the state but also to "any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights." There is consensus that ATI is a fundamental justiciable human right, both as a so-called freedom right and as a lever or instrument of other economic, social, and cultural rights (Adeleke, 2013, p. 83; Calland, 2013, p. 18). Thus ATI is a civil and political right, but it is also a tool for social development because it is a prerequisite for access to other rights. As Adeleke (2013, p. 102) argues, "It is only through the right of ATI that the public can, by accessing information, demand the respect, protection, and fulfilment of their rights."

The implication is that the state has a positive duty to ensure access to these rights by providing the requisite mechanisms, infrastructure, and tools. We would argue that public libraries, as multipurpose community-information centers, are examples of such mechanisms. But, as Mathiesen (2008) of the University of Arizona points out, there is no mention of libraries in the legal ATI literature. Thus in their discussion of the right of access to online information in South Africa, Adeleke and Phooko (2013), while covering the potential of mobile devices and public internet terminals in post offices, pay no heed to public libraries. To a librarian, the gap is especially vexing when they argue that, even if the mobile device challenges of affordability and coverage could be solved, "challenges of education and awareness" (p. 165) would still remain. Mathiesen (2008, p. 16) finds it "amusing" that some could argue for the right to free mobile phones and not think of libraries. She gives four reasons to support her argument that public libraries with professional staff are "lynchpin institutions" for ATI and hence for other human rights:

1. They provide information for free.
2. They collect and organize government and public information and records so that people can find what they need.
3. Their literacy, digital, and information literacy education programs empower people to use information to make better lives for themselves.
4. Their collections represent diverse views and promote understanding and tolerance (p. 17).

The 2007 study of ICT access in South Africa sponsored by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) provides support for Mathiesen's arguments, although without any explicit mention of ATI rights. The investigation, having mapped and assessed various models of public ICT access, concluded that public libraries, as community information centers, should take the lead in bridging digital divides. It highlighted that libraries add value to their ICT facilities by means of their educational

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programs that teach information-management skills (Tlabela, Roodt, & Paterson, 2007, p. 100).

Since the HSRC study, the National Library of South Africa, with a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has established the Mzansi Libraries On-Line project, which explicitly makes the connections among digital information, libraries, and democracy. According to the Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, the project's goal is to provide free internet connectivity for all South Africans through public libraries in order to develop an "information literate citizenry who can participate meaningfully in a democratic and knowledge-based society" (Mabudafhasi, 2015, n.p.).

The proviso in Mathiesen's claims for the "lynchpin" role of libraries in democracy and information rights is that libraries have to be accessible to the *whole* of society, not just the educated and/or urban elite. This condition is echoed by others—for example, by the authors of a study of public libraries in three young democracies: Namibia, Nepal, and Malawi (Ignatow et al., 2012, p. 78). They set out to investigate the conventional library rhetoric on the positive relationship of libraries to democracy by examining the library systems in the three developing countries, which, since the 1960s, have emerged from autocratic regimes. Situating their research within the social-capital theories of Bourdieu and Putnam, their starting premise is that the contribution of public libraries to participative democracy depends on their generating and distributing valuable cultural, social, and economic capital, which will empower their user communities. Their conclusion is that while indeed public libraries did expand in two of their chosen countries following democratic transitions, this was not due to a deliberative democratic process but rather to interventions by non-government organizations and other groups outside the countries. While acknowledging the limited scale of the research and the need to broaden their focus, Ignatow and colleagues find "little evidence that public libraries in the three countries generate or distribute significant amounts of cultural, social, or economic capital to non-elites" (p. 78). They are therefore cautious about claiming that public libraries have contributed to the building of democracy in the three countries.

Civic participation is a strong theme in the discussions of the role of libraries in democratic societies, perhaps in response to perceptions of increases in civic disengagement and apathy. The challenge of pervasive ICTs might also explain this interest because, according to Janes and Ptacek (2013, p. 30), libraries are looking for ways to "expand their footprint." Civic engagement might take the form of community participation in the work of libraries, as in building collections of indigenous knowledge (Greyling, 2008), establishing boards for teenagers to advise on the kinds of libraries they want (King, 2005), or in building teams of baby-boomer volunteers (Ristau, 2010). However, some argue for a more explicitly political role by, for example, extending traditional literacy programming to include civic and political literacy (Clubb, 2006), or turning libraries into centers for debate on local

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and national issues in order to nurture "deliberative" democracy (Kranich, 2013, p. 15). Some individuals view this as an extension of the mission of libraries to safeguard the freedom of expression (Berry, 1999). All this implies a shift away from libraries' passive mediatory role. Madsen (2009, p. 11) quotes a Danish librarian, Grete Halling, who considers her library an "agent provocateur" in initiating a series of debates on topical political issues.

Public Libraries in Postapartheid South Africa

This last thread of comment is of particular interest for South African public librarians, who in recent years have been caught up in the stormy waters of our youthful democracy. As mentioned above, more than twenty public libraries have been destroyed by arson in so-called service-delivery protests since 2009 (Van Onselen, 2014). The disturbing failure of participative democracy is evident in Dick's (2015) summary at the International Federation of Library Association's (IFLA) World Library and Information Congress in Cape Town of the "causes" of twelve recent burnings in one province, as provided by the provincial library director. They include unsatisfactory government service delivery, disputes among political parties, a municipal decision to move an event away from the town, outsider staff appointments, and disputed municipal boundaries. A 2014 newspaper article quotes Peter Lor, the former director of South Africa's National Library, who attributes the incidents to "deep frustration bordering on despair, a failure of grassroots democracy, and the tendency of ordinary people still to associate municipal institutions with agencies of governmental control as they were during apartheid" (Van Onselen, 2014). Elsewhere, Lor (2013, p. 371) warns that the LIS profession needs to address the social and political factors underlying the arson if it is to have any relevance to the vast majority of South Africans.

The South African government's report marking the twentieth anniversary of the first democratic election documents the many advances during the ensuing two decades (South Africa, The Presidency, 2014). However, there is widespread recognition of "unfree freedom" (February & Calland, 2013); people may be free to vote, but they are still trapped by their poverty. The country's poverty gap is one of the worst in the world, with nearly 54 percent of the population surviving on about $50 (ZAR779) per month, and 12 million living in extreme poverty and hunger (Statistics South Africa, 2014). There is widespread dissatisfaction at the pace of change, with consequently increasing numbers of violent protests (Moore, 2015). There is also concern about the threats that this discontent might pose to democracy. In its latest manifesto for socioeconomic transformation, the *NDP*, the government borrows from the African National Congress's blueprint when it came to power in 1994, *The Reconstruction and Development Programme* (*RDP*), in acknowledging the threats to democracy posed by the massive inequalities that persist: "No political democracy can survive and flourish if the mass of our people remain in poverty, without land, without tangible prospects for a better life" (South Africa, National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 24).

The authors of the *RDP* were clear that transformation would not come from government alone but from the participation of individuals at all levels: "Democracy is more than electing representatives to power once every few years. It means enabling people, especially women, to participate in decision-making at all levels of their lives—through people's forums, negotiating forums, workplace committees, local development committees and referendums" (African National Congress, 1994, sec. 5.2.6). However, there is a consensus that the country is still far from being a mature participatory democracy in which citizens at the grassroots level are partners with the government in decision making, as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001). Tapscott (2007) lays the blame on local government:

Despite the best intentions of legislators and policymakers, however, it is evident that the majority of municipalities have thus far failed to give effect to the principles of *Batho Pele* [putting the people first] and participatory democracy. Indeed, public frustration with what are perceived to be meaningless exercises in participation through ward committees, public meetings . . . and the like is steadily growing. (p. 84)

The library burnings have to be viewed against this backdrop. Lor (2013) is critical of the superficial responses of South African librarians to the burnings, who, he claims, "after brief expressions of dismay, go back to business as usual" (p. 371). He contends that the profession needs to reflect more on the complex context in which South African libraries are situated and examine their role in townships and shack settlements. His words on the need for *relevance* echo those of the various think tanks during the transition to democracy in the early 1990s.

In retrospect, the early 1990s was a hopeful time for South African librarianship. As in all other areas of society, the looming demise of the apartheid government led to lively debate on what kind of libraries the profession envisaged for the new democracy. Position papers spelled out a vision for transformation. There was talk of a new African and "radical" model (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992, pp. 55–56). A key element was the acceptance of a "developmental" model in which information was seen as a "key element in the implementation and sustenance of democracy and the education and empowerment of people" (p. 55).

However, the optimism of the early 1990s was dampened by the restrictions in public spending that followed the country's inclusion in the global market economy (Dick, 2002, p. 30). Lor (1998), the chairperson of the Transitional Executive Committee of the new professional association, the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), contended in a submission to Parliament in 1998 that budget cutbacks were "crippling" libraries (p. 7). Leach's research (1998) confirmed Lor's assertions, finding widespread rationalizing and downsizing.

After years of lobbying by the LIS profession, the National Council for Library and Information Services Act of 2001 marked the beginning of improved fortunes for South African libraries. Although hampered by the lack of resources, the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS) has proven to have an important leadership and advocacy role. In 2005 it reported to Parliament on the challenges confronting "over-stretched" and "under-funded" LIS (South Africa, NCLIS, 2005, n.p.) and promoted a new vision for the LIS sector: that it be reoriented in accordance with a developmental agenda, and that political decision makers and administrators be mobilized to prioritize funding. And indeed, in 2005 the government announced the Community Libraries Conditional Grant of ZAR1 billion to be administered by the Department of Arts and Culture (under whose purview South African public libraries are). A further grant of ZAR1.8 billion followed in 2012.

The grants set specific targets, such as "improved coordination and collaboration between national, provincial and local government on library services," "transformed and equitable LIS delivered to all rural and urban communities," and "improved library infrastructure and services that reflect the specific needs of the communities they serve" (South Africa, Department of Arts and Culture, 2012). In late 2015 the department reported that the conditional grants had funded eighty-one new libraries and upgraded another 343. However, the spending of the grant money has been uneven, with several of the so-called new provinces, established since 1994, lacking the capacity to manage them. Thus two provinces have spent less than 40 percent of their funds.[2]

In 2008 the first grant provided funds for the NCLIS to commission the *LIS Transformation Charter*, which is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

The LIS Transformation Charter: Political and Professional Dynamics

As mentioned above, the last few years have brought a number of charters across different sectors, inspired by the 1955 *Freedom Charter*, the statement of core beliefs at the heart of South Africa's democracy (Marcus, 1985). All have aimed at redressing the injustices of apartheid. The team appointed to write the *LIS Transformation Charter* was comprised of LIS practitioners and academics, and also academics and consultants from other disciplines with experience in drafting charters. It thus needed to find common ground in a cross-disciplinary team experienced in various traditions. The composition of the team had the potential for tension and conflict because the librarians involved were acutely aware that they were personally answerable to the professional community, whereas the other members could construct a safe distance between themselves and the LIS sector as technical experts and academics unbound by ties of loyalty and professional identity. Participation in shared meanings proved challenging at times, as will be shown below.

We needed also to manage the expectations of the LIS community and correct possible misperceptions of what a charter can do; for example, it is not policy or law, but has the capacity to provide guidance on the setting of policy objectives, likely to result in legislation. We also had to be mindful that the charter would reach (and ideally persuade) multiple audiences, in addition to the LIS profession, such as governmental departments, the Cabinet, Treasury, civic society, the ICT sector, and the book trade.

In common with several of the charters in other sectors, the production of the *LIS Transformation Charter* was unexpectedly slow. It comprised two phases, with a hiatus of three years between the two. In the first phase, various iterations of the charter (drafts 1–6) were presented at meetings for comment and criticism and made available to the public on the website of the National Library of South Africa. In 2009 draft 6 was accepted at a national summit by the professional community as the final draft, which then was submitted by the NCLIS to the government ministers responsible for LIS. The ministers received and accepted the draft before it was sent to Parliament for discussion by portfolio committees, a necessary step prior to submission to the Cabinet for endorsement. Once the draft was handed over, the charter's technical team had no means of expediting the process, which relied upon political interventions to claim and secure it as an item on the government agenda, a difficult task during the election year of 2009. The conventional postelection Cabinet shuffle inevitably brought in new ministers, who could be assumed to have no prior knowledge of the charter processes.

However, what appeared to be a hiatus from 2010 to 2013 in which the charter disappeared from our sight was in fact a period of huge significance, as will be explained below. It brought some shifts in the political environment that necessitated some radical rethinking by the charter team, which reassembled in 2013. Its second phase of work was to result in a different though enhanced document, the so-called final draft (draft 7).

Phase 1: 2008–2009
The scope and purpose of the *LIS Transformation Charter* launched in 2008 was to "define the challenges facing the sector and to provide a framework for effecting the changes needed for the sector to contribute to the elimination of illiteracy, eradication of inequality in the sector, promotion of social cohesion, and building an informed and reading nation" (p. v). In common with other charters, it would be informed by the spirit and values of the Constitution and Bill of Rights and adhere to the government's principle of aiming for a social compact through widespread participation by all stakeholders to enhance acceptance and endorsement of policy directions. Consequently, consultative workshops were held in all provinces to engage the professional sector and citizens, to listen to their concerns and their suggestions.

The issues were outlined by the technical team, who thus controlled the agenda by framing the discussion in terms of the needs of a developmental state, a concept that has its roots in the modernization model of many East Asian nations, such as Japan's, pursued in the second half of the twentieth century (Gumede, 2009, p. 4). It places a high value on those measures that "ensure equitable distribution of opportunities and wealth" (Johnson, 1982, p. 17). The team's aim was to find and articulate a common vision of transformed LIS that would mobilize librarians to participate in activities that would advance the national development agenda and redress past inequalities. One of the tasks of the charter consultations was to prompt discussion of these imperatives and find examples of library practice explicitly promoting them. However, it has to be said that discussions in the provincial forums tended to focus on burning issues for the profession, such as low professional status, the low visibility of LIS, and uneven employment conditions.

The longest chapter, separated from the discussions of the other subsectors, in the final draft of this first phase was devoted to the urgent issue of the scarcity of school libraries, which by all accounts was impacting on other LIS subsectors. Thus public libraries reported being inundated with school pupils in search of resources to cope with the demands of the transformed curriculum. In the absence of other explanations, it seemed likely that the possibly discomfiting highlighting of the neglect of school LIS by the Department of Education was the stumbling block in the way of final government approval of the *LIS Transformation Charter*, and might explain its disappearance from view between 2010 and 2013.

Phase 2: 2013–2014
This possibility was lent support early in 2013 when the two new cabinet ministers with responsibility for the country's libraries (Arts and Culture, and Basic Education) requested a meeting with the charter's chairperson and some of its authors. It was soon clear that the issue of school libraries had indeed prompted the call for the meeting. It seemed that the highly visible civic action by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Equal Education, in its campaign for school libraries from 2009, including a series of marches by thousands of school children and widely publicized court actions on the alleged string of "broken promises" from 2012, had put pressure on the government to address the dire school library situation. During 2010–2011 the NGO had issued booklets titled *We Can't Afford Not To: Costing the Provision of Functional School Libraries in South African Public Schools* (Equal Education, 2011), which drew on insights and evidence from draft 6 of the charter. The intersections of the school library campaign of Equal Education and the charter processes have been explored elsewhere (Hart & Zinn, 2015).

In response to the pressures from civic society, the Education Department had embarked on some remedial actions, such as the publication of school LIS guidelines in 2012 (South Africa, Department of Basic Education, 2012) and a ten-year plan in 2013 for school libraries (which it acknowledged was still dependent

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on Treasury's approval). But at the meeting with the charter's technical team, both ministers proposed an interim solution to the demands for the establishment of a school library in every school. They argued that, in light of the unaffordability of this goal in both the short or medium terms, the solution should be sought in terms of a new paradigm that transcended institutional types to embrace a vision of shared responsibility for the provision of services to young people. They advocated for the potential for joint-use school/community LIS, for example, through the strategic siting of new public libraries close to schools to facilitate targeted services for school children.

The *LIS Transformation Charter* process was thus reactivated with the convening of its team and a series of meetings with the NCLIS and Department of Arts and Culture to agree on the new terms of reference that were to produce a seventh, final draft, taking into account the views of the two ministers and incorporating the developments within the Department of Basic Education. Another positive development that stemmed directly from the sixth draft was the initiating and publishing of the South African Public Library and Information Services Bill by the Department of Arts and Culture in 2010. Once enacted, this bill will lay the foundation for the drafting and proclamation of national norms and standards, which the LIS profession has lobbied for over many years.

The adoption of the ecosystem paradigm was a key shift in thinking in the second phase of the *LIS Transformation Charter*. The revision of it started in mid-2013, with the team agreeing that the new paradigm could find expression in the metaphor of an *ecosystem*. Earlier, we mentioned the struggle at times to find shared meanings across the technical team. The adoption of the ecosystem frame provoked much debate within the team. Thus while we (LIS members) viewed the ecosystem as acknowledging diversity while encouraging mutuality, interdependence, and collaboration, the other team members interpreted it as the creation of a single integrated system with enforced sharing, with all barriers among LIS subsectors being broken down. Their argument was that "these institutions came into being from a single overarching function" (*LIS Transformation Charter*, 2014, p. v); however, they backed down from this radical position, and it was agreed that the use of *ecosystem* as framing device would be a sound analytical tool, with generative capacity for innovation and genuine transformation. We drew on the literature of organizational dynamics to ground our approach—for example, Mars, Bronstein, and Lusch (2012)—referring also to the work of authors in the field of human/ computer interfaces who had taken an early lead in exploring the notion of *information ecology*. Nardi and O'Day (1999), for example, describe an ecosystem as one in which the subsystems are interlinked and interdependent and where there is continuous co-evolution, change is systemic, and complementarity encourages niches for different roles and functions. It is also characterized by interactions of "actors and organizations linked by flows of resources and information" (Mars, Bronstein, & Lusch, 2012, p. 277). In the final (seventh) draft, we argue therefore that the

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concept captures the diversity and complexity of South African LIS and the necessary interaction between the system (or "organism" in ecological terms) and its environment (*LIS Transformation Charter*, 2014, p. 36).

Our advocacy of the concept of an ecosystem was partly motivated by the complexity of the governance and stakeholder relationships in LIS in South Africa and our concern that the subsectors were operating in silos. All three tiers of government are involved in LIS policy, funding, and delivery. Thus at the central government level there are three departments with funding and oversight responsibility for public, university, and school libraries; provincial governments, as mentioned earlier, have been assigned the competence for public libraries; and, again as mentioned earlier, local authorities in many instances deliver the service in the absence of a directly funded mandate, but guided by a variety of agreements with provincial departments. Kraak (2003) suggests that a developmental state needs joined-up policy and cross-sectoral intervention, an observation made against the well-documented history of poor collaboration among the three tiers of government.

A stronger emphasis on human rights issues is evident in the final draft. Much of the charter's preface is devoted to the right of ATI and to LIS. While acknowledging the challenges of insisting on ATI in a country with so many competing, unfulfilled basic needs and rights, it argues that the national burden of poverty and persistent structural inequality is immense, but many political and moral arguments are available to support calls upon government and its social partners to ensure the right of access to information. South Africans already have political and moral duties of social cohesion and inclusion. Why, then, complicate matters by calling upon the right of access to information? Simply because the right of access to information can make a difference. The key point is that as a right it concerns the distribution of power and status. Those with access to information have an enforceable claim, and need not rely simply on the goodness of others. . . . The point of establishing the right of access to information is to try to rebalance the power relationship, and to produce long-term, reliable structures that will remove the need for dependence in the future. That, at least, is the hope that underpins the Charter, and that is why the right of access to information is worth pressing for. (*LIS Transformation Charter*, 2014, pp. viii–ix)

Our highlighting of ATI as a foundational principle of the philosophy of librarianship speaks to the values of a society based on human rights, and one whose government has committed to Agenda 2013 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 25, 2015 (UN General Assembly, 2015). South Africa hosted the most recent IFLA congress, during which an IFLA officer, Fiona Bradley, urged member associations to embark on systematic projects that would contribute to the SDGs, stressing that ATI is critical for their achievement. She also encouraged librarians to develop indicators capable of measuring the impact of these programs (Bradley, 2015). IFLA's efforts at stimulating and documenting library activities to support the SDGs were strengthened by a

statement of African Ministers of Culture who met separately to discuss the status of libraries and implementation of ATI. They issued a declaration that, among other pledges, commits the African countries represented "to promote library policies on access to information as part of a universal human rights approach as well as rights of people to knowledge" (*Cape Town Declaration*, 2015).

"Underpinning the Implementation Plan," the concluding chapter of the charter, is a framework for indicators and milestones of progress for the thirty-nine recommendations made, clustered into six categories: policy; legislation; governance; human resources/capital; infrastructure; and funding. The paradigmatic shift toward the LIS ecosystem is reflected in the framework, with its emphasis on collaboration and partnerships across sectors, across library types, with civil society, with government, and with government's social partners. Two important new recommendations emerged from political developments as the charter was being finalized. One relates to the plan by the Department of Arts and Culture to merge the NCLIS with other councils in their remit, thus impoverishing its status; and the other to the failure of some provincial governments to guarantee the specific uses of the conditional-grants funding mentioned above, in contravention of the set conditions. Thus the charter recommends strengthening the NCLIS by changing its status to that of an executive body with a budget and well-resourced secretariat (*LIS Transformation Charter*, 2014, p. 91); it also proposes that the Department of Arts and Culture be given the power to intervene to ensure that provinces are compelled to earmark funds from the Treasury for their stated purpose (p. 90).

Conclusion: Prospects for LIS Transformation

Earlier, we alluded to Dick's warning (2014) that the future of the *LIS Transformation Charter* would depend on "political champions, public pressure, norms and standards, legislation, and a transformed mind-set" (p. 101). The writing of the final draft recognizes political realities and consciously uses language that resonates with that of the government. We drew on the latest expression of its manifesto for development in the *NDP*, which indicates that "for a mobilised, active and responsible citizenry to flourish, knowledge of and support for a common set of values should form the pillar of the country's development" (South Africa, National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 81). Thus we foregrounded the LIS sector's value proposition, arguing for its capacity to be an effective partner in delivering the government's goals, along the spectrum of basic functional literacy to research, knowledge production, and innovation.

The status of the charter is frequently characterized as an "aspirational document," hence stressing the importance of the LIS sector's agency and signaling that legislation and funding are not automatic consequences of its approval. The South African Public Library and Information Services Bill is already a positive outcome of the charter; and the subsequent report for the Treasury, which lays out an expansive five-year rollout plan, is a reassuring indication of a secure future for public

libraries (South Africa, Department of Arts and Culture, 2013). However, the delay in enacting the bill is worrisome. Our LIS ecosystem approach is predicated on collaboration across the subsectors, and, for delivery of services to youth and children, systemic protocols for collaboration with the education and school system. The publication by the Department of Basic Education of guidelines for collaboration between education departments and their LIS counterparts in other departments is perhaps evidence of some progress, but the guidelines are yet to be tested in practice (South Africa, Department of Basic Education, 2013).

Earlier in this paper mention was made of the failure of some South African transformation charters due to their failure to gain acceptance within their sectors and the lack of bodies to oversee their implementation (Mawson, 2013). Reassuring support for the *LIS Transformation Charter* across the various LIS subsectors came in November 2014, when a national symposium was hosted by the NCLIS to discuss and move it forward. The thirty-nine recommendations in the charter were discussed and consensus reached on the top five, as follows:

- A national library strategy to guide the sector as a whole
- The drafting of an LIS transformation plan
- The drafting of a national school libraries policy
- Seamless services
- The NCLIS to become an executive body, with a dedicated budget and well-resourced secretariat having the power to make executive decisions

This consensus empowers the NCLIS, as custodian of the process, to initiate steps for implementation. The departure from patterns of entrenched, inward-looking behavior and the cultivation of a transformed mindset, as reflected in the acceptance of the need for "seamless services," will facilitate the achievement of the charter's ecosystem vision.

We would argue that the *LIS Transformation Charter* lays out a vision for librarianship that both echoes the idealism of the early 1990s and, in learning some hard lessons during the intervening years, lays out an attainable path for our libraries across all their subsectors to fulfill their mission. The final charter offers a vision of a transformed and integrated library system that has meaning to all sectors of South African society. However, whether it will fulfill its vision is still open to question. Its champions will need resilience in persuading individuals in positions of power in government and civic society of the role of LIS in the "better life for all" that was promised by the founders of our young democracy.

Note

1. Andrew Carnegie, qtd. in Thomas Hensley, *The Boundaries of Freedom and Order in American Democracy* (2001), p. 186.
2. Update on national projects (to NCLIS), South African Department of Arts and Culture, November 20, 2015.

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