EVALUATION OF MAP COLLECTIONS AND CARTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION NEEDS OF SPECIAL AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN SRI LANKA

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2002/MLS/03

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF LIBRARY AND

INFORMATION SCIENCE

2004 July

Abstract

Although map collections have a long and evolutionary history, the profession of map librarianship has not yet established in Sri Lanka. Developments in new technology have radically changed the nature of map production and the distribution of spatial data among users. This study was designed to identify collection of maps (map collection) in libraries of Sri Lanka and to evaluate the cartographic information needs of users in special libraries and academic libraries.

To identify libraries and institutions, that use maps, a preliminary survey was conducted. 35 special libraries and 8 university libraries were identified. A survey was then carried out to identify the users of maps in these institutions and universities. It was found that the number of users was limited. Therefore the whole population was taken into the survey. Two sets of questionnaires were sent to the libraries/ institutions and to the users respectively.

With the results of this study, it was possible to identify maps according to four main categories, namely special libraries, map centres in institutions, map libraries in universities and geography and geology departments in universities. Nine (9) map producing institutions were also identified along with the Survey Department of Sri Lanka. Map collections in the above four categories were analyzed under type and format of maps, organization, storage, collection management and user services.

The response rate of map users was 60% and out of this 22% of users was identified as non-library users. The user survey revealed that there was a gap between the needs of the users and the services provided by the libraries. Users were competent in the use of technology when seeking information on cartography. They used technology mostly from their places of work, while libraries were not equipped with new technological equipment to provide the necessary services. 61% of the libraries/map centres had closed access systems and 50% of the libraries/map centres had access restrictions.

In the analysis regarding attitudes and opinions towards online map collections, users welcomed the idea of having online map collection while librarians/managers showed more concern about having a national union catalogue.

The findings from the survey revealed that libraries have a more prominent role to play in catering to the needs of this special user category. The survey also revealed that developing good coordination between map librarians and cartographers was a necessity. Training for the enhancement of knowledge and skills of librarians/ managers in Sri Lanka could be achieved by collaborating with relevant international organizations to meet these needs.