

# Building Bibliodiversity

Marianne Ryan

The increased emphasis on equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice in academia is not only warranted but overdue. In areas from hiring to enrollment to curricular offerings, universities have endeavored to offer a welcoming environment and an inclusive context for teaching, learning, and research that represents the world in which we live. Higher education's commitment to diversity and social justice, manifested in mission statements and highlighted in strategic plans, signals strong commitment to these values.

An aspect of inclusivity on the higher education landscape that has gotten less attention is bibliodiversity. The term remains unfamiliar to many, not because attempts to diversify academic content have not happened or have not been a priority but because there has been a less concerted effort to use a single term, such as *bibliodiversity*, to convey the sum of these parts. At a time when issues such as representative viewpoints, access to information, and equalization of education are front and center, a commitment to bibliodiversity and a more coherent articulation of its principles by academic libraries could help to catalyze action and reorientation. Yet, as the International Alliance of Independent Publishers says, the concept of bibliodiversity "which rapidly gained currency and is rich in potential, remains little explored and debated, with limited thorough analysis."<sup>1</sup>

### The Emergence of Bibliodiversity

Bibliodiversity is not a recent phenomenon, but its origin story is somewhat murky. Conventional wisdom indicates that its roots can be traced back to a group of Chilean publishers who invented the Spanish term *bibliodiversidad* when they founded the Editores Independientes de Chile collective in the late 1990s. Other publishing groups have staked a claim to coining the actual term, if not to the overarching conceptualization.

In response to the establishment of the Chilean collective, European publishers met in Spain in 2000 and Paris in 2001, near the time of UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. After these discussions, what is now known as the International Alliance of Independent Publishers formed in 2002. A global network of 800 publishers from 55 countries, the alliance emerged as the universal voice in support of bibliodiversity. Its advocacy, through meetings, workshops, projects, and communications, has



helped foster global awareness of bibliodiversity as an international movement. Among the initiatives it has undertaken, the alliance established Bibliodiversity Day, celebrated annually each September since 2010. In 2016, the group created the Bibliodiversity Observatory to assess and strengthen bibliodiversity efforts throughout the world. Following the establishment of the alliance, national publishers' groups met on other continents and declared their solidarity with the collaborative.<sup>2</sup>

Bibliodiversity emerged as a significant concept at a time that was ripe for it. The 1990s presented an opportune moment to consider bibliographic diversification more holistically. With the advent of the Internet, a new mechanism became available to not only distribute content but also create it. New techniques enabled people to identify and access information that previously had been hard to find. The Internet provided opportunities to discover small publishers and presses that had been working in obscurity. It also became a medium for self-publishing.

### **Bibliodiversity Defined**

Originally defined as "cultural diversity applied to the writing and publishing world," bibliodiversity was thought of as "a complex, self-sustaining system of storytelling, writing, publishing, and other kinds of production of oral and written literature." This initial description speaks to ensuring a range of rich cultural perspectives and a wide assortment of formats, "the critical diversity of products (books, scripts, eBooks, apps, and oral literature) made available to readers."<sup>3</sup> Implicit in this definition is the unique ability of independent publishers to produce a variety of output. Resonant with this notion is S. R. Ranganathan's second law of library science, "Every person his or her book."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to understanding the "what" of bibliodiversity, it is important to consider the "how"—the strategies and mechanisms necessary to make it a reality in the fullest sense. The thinking about bibliodiversity has evolved to reflect the growing complexity of the issue. Referencing the scholarly communication ecosystem, Kathleen Shearer, Leslie Chan, Iryna Kuchma, and Pierre Mounier note that "diversity in services and platforms, funding mechanisms, and evaluation measures will allow the scholarly communication system to accommodate the different workflows, languages, publication outputs, and research topics" of multiple research communities.<sup>5</sup> This more all-encompassing definition speaks to potential delivery methods that facilitate broad access and discoverability. This is where libraries come in.

### **Bibliodiversity in Practice**

The concept of bibliodiversity has largely resided in the publishing community, but it is applicable to academic institutions and their libraries. The well-established practice of libraries crafting strong collection development policies to support teaching, learning, and research within and across disciplinary structures provides a foundation. Such policies must be expanded to further ensure a breadth and depth of materials that can sustain diverse intellectual inquiry and pursuits. Including historically diminished and marginalized perspectives, underrepresented voices, and wide-ranging points of view—and including them proactively in patron-driven acquisition—will enrich the collections libraries make available and will foster intellectual curiosity and the free exploration of



knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Offering content in an array of formats, both physically and digitally, to respond to varied user preferences and individual needs should be a priority. Cataloging practices and metadata that enable wide discoverability and easy access are critical, as is a strong information literacy component, inviting users to actively explore, evaluate, and engage content offerings and to create new ones.

Libraries have long purchased content from large publishers and vendors through approval plans, “big deals” that bundle content into a large package of journals costing less than they would through individual subscriptions, and other buying practices. But sheer quantity does not guarantee bibliodiversity; in fact, it may even increase homogeneity by overvaluing the policies and practices of one publishing house or another. Balancing the acquisition of mainstay materials with unique items can provide added topical and cultural dimensions to library holdings. Participation in consortial arrangements for access to some content is another strategy that can free up collection dollars and allow more investment in unique special collections, which then can be digitized for remote access and use. Building institutional repositories makes the scholarly outputs of faculty and students openly accessible. Including government information, much of it available at no cost and without copyright restrictions, provides additional richness and bibliodiversification. However, unless the parent institution allocates adequate collections budgets that keep pace with inflation and with expanding programs and majors, the library’s efforts toward bibliodiversity will be thwarted. The university’s ability to recruit diverse faculty and students may in turn be hampered, thereby diminishing educational equity. Ideally, collections budgeting can become self-sustaining, with advocacy from diverse stakeholders helping to drive choices and resources.

Academic libraries can employ other mechanisms to advance bibliodiversity at minimal expense. Open access (OA) publishing, transformative agreements that gradually replace the subscription-based business model with open access, open educational resources (OER), and affordable textbook initiatives all shift the payment paradigm to expand access to content. For any of these to be successful, there needs to be strong collaboration between librarians and faculty, as well as infrastructural and financial support from universities.

### ***portal*’s Efforts to Bibliodiversify**

Bibliodiversity applies not only to libraries but also to individual journals. *portal*’s original three goals—to offer an affordable alternative to serials that had risen exponentially in cost; to provide a more inviting and supportive environment for authors; and to model a new scholarly framework—accorded with the concept of bibliodiversity. In 2000, the journal’s founders, “rebellious against the deleterious effects of commercialism on the exchange of scholarly information,” mapped a new pricing model that made content accessible to more readers.<sup>7</sup> An editorial in October 2020 written by *portal*’s entire Editorial Board acknowledged that “from its outset, academic publishing has failed to offer a level playing field for authors.” The journal pledged to strengthen support for novice scholars, improving further on the journal’s innovative second goal, by offering “a more inviting, constructive, and productive environment” through mentoring and best practices in scholarly communication, including faster article review and turnaround time.<sup>8</sup>



In the 22 years since *portal's* establishment, the journal has taken numerous steps to remain responsive to authors and their needs. It has actively tracked article submissions to promote intentional representation from across states, regions, and urban and rural areas, and from educational institutions ranging from community colleges to R1 universities, and everything in between. Topical emphases have continued to expand, mirroring the changing nature of academic libraries and their place within the context of higher education and the communities they serve.

A journal's mission should always dictate its direction. As a self-described international journal, *portal* launched the "Global Perspectives" feature in 2015, inviting authors worldwide to submit manuscripts. Since its inception, nearly 30 articles by scholars from a dozen countries on six continents have been published in "Global Perspectives," and authors from many other countries have appeared elsewhere in the pages of *portal*. The journal has further diversified its content with articles focused on practice in addition to theory and has included research that explores atypical topics such as storytelling, Indigenous Canadian librarianship, and Japanese popular culture studies.

Finally, a journal's editorial board plays a critical role in bibliodiversifying what appears on its pages. *portal's* commitment to an Editorial Board membership comprising varied voices, perspectives, backgrounds, and areas of expertise ensures inclusivity and diversity. The journal's overall pledge to uphold equity, justice, and inclusion aligns well with the central values of its publisher, the Johns Hopkins University Press.<sup>9</sup>

### Editorial Transition

Another way to support a journal's diversity of perspective is to encourage editorial transitions at reasonable intervals. While an argument can be made that longevity of an editor's tenure provides the opportunity to take risks and see initiatives through, lengthy service may also sustain established practice and a single point of view. Change, after a while, is good.

Effective January 2023, I will conclude my eighth and final year as *portal's* editor. It has been a privilege, a pleasure, and a highlight of my career to be the journal's longest-serving editor. Diversifying the voices on *portal's* pages and the topics they explore has been a priority during my tenure, as has enriching the mix of viewpoints around the Editorial Board table, expanding where articles come from, and starting new regular features. With volume 23, current assistant editor Ellysa Stern Cahoy will take over. A board member since 2016 and a former recipient of *portal's* Best Article Award, Ellysa is well positioned to lead the journal as it grows and evolves. For a time, I will continue to contribute to the *portal* enterprise in the role of past editor.

Sara Dreyfuss, *portal's* managing editor since 2013, also will step down in January. An unparalleled copyeditor, Sara's skillful touch with both content and correspondence ensured that each issue was as close as possible to publication perfection. Once identified, her successor will be announced. At the same time, one-third of our stellar Editorial Board members also will transition to make way for a fresh cohort. At *portal*, our board members add value not only in meetings but also through mentoring; each works individually with several manuscript authors every year to improve and/or prepare content for publication. I am indebted to the board for its unique ability to bring both academic rigor and kindness to this work.<sup>10</sup>



Bibliodiversity and the practices that help to build it is the work not only of publishers but also of libraries and the academy. Going forward, *portal's* efforts to support bibliodiversity will be in good hands.

*Marianne Ryan is the editor of portal: Libraries and the Academy and the dean of libraries at Loyola University Chicago; she may be reached by e-mail at: mryan21@luc.edu.*

## Notes

1. See International Alliance of Independent Publishers, "Bibliodiversité Review," <https://www.alliance-editeurs.org/-bibliodiversity-journal,118-?lang=en>.
2. This information and additional detail about bibliodiversity and the role of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers in advancing it are available at <https://www.alliance-editeurs.org/>.
3. See *bibliodiversity* as defined in the glossary of OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks) at <https://oabooks-toolkit.org/glossary/article/11189671-bibliodiversity> and in International Alliance of Independent Publishers, "International Declaration of Independent Publishers, for the Protection and Promotion of Bibliodiversity," 2007, [https://www.alliance-editeurs.org/IMG/pdf/Declaration\\_2007\\_eng.pdf](https://www.alliance-editeurs.org/IMG/pdf/Declaration_2007_eng.pdf).
4. S. R. Ranganathan, *The Five Laws of Library Science* (London: Edward Goldston, 1931).
5. Kathleen Shearer, Leslie Chan, Iryna Kuchma, and Pierre Mounier, "Fostering Bibliodiversity in Scholarly Communications: A Call for Action!" 2020, [https://zenodo.org/record/3752923#.YvPE9\\_HMJ8Y](https://zenodo.org/record/3752923#.YvPE9_HMJ8Y).
6. The specific elements of collection development policies differ from one library to the next. These are some that are central at my institution, Loyola University Chicago Libraries.
7. Gloriana St. Clair, "Through *portal*," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 1, 1 (2001): v–vii.
8. The Editorial Board of *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, "This Is Not Enough. We Can Do Better," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 20, 4 (2020): 559–63.
9. See the Johns Hopkins University Press Code of Conduct at <https://www.press.jhu.edu/code-conduct>.
10. I extend heartfelt thanks to each of the board members who served during my term as editor: Becky Albitz, Verónica Arellano Douglas, Consuella Askew, David Bawden, Steven Bell, Jennifer Brannock, Ellysa Stern Cahoy, Mary Casserly, Joan Cheverie, Beth Clausen, Vicki Coleman, Diane Dallis-Comentale, Deborah Dancik, Kathleen De Long, Carol Pitts Diedrichs, Tomalee Doan, Elizabeth Dow, Donna Ferullo, Peggy Fry, Julie Garrison, Bob Gerrity, Melody Herr, Damon Jaggars, Kate Johnson, Kyle Jones, Neal Kaske, Hana Kim, Lindsay King, Joy Kirchner, Glenn Koelling, Karen Kohn, Ronald Larsen, Mark Lenker, Harriet Lightman, Joan Lippincott, John Lombardi, Jamie Makatche, James Matarazzo, Gillian McCombs, Ann Medaille, Willie Miller, David Minor, James Neal, Carmelita Pickett, Sarah Pritchard, Kyle Roberts, Fred Rowland, Carlen Ruschoff, Jay Satterfield, Tim Schlak, Brian Schottlaender, Sue Searing, Maribeth Slebodnik, Bill Sleeman, Herbert Snyder, Helen Spalding, Mark Stover, Karla Strieb, Jack Sulzer, Thomas Teper, Mary Augusta Thomas, Scott Vine, William Walters, Sarah Barbara Watstein, Janice Welburn, William Welburn, James Williams, and Jerome Yavarkovsky.

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