



# Navigating “Here”: Collaborative approaches in creating social, cultural, and digital inclusion in information spaces

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## Abstract

Volume 8, Issue 2 of *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* (IJIDI). This introductory article synthesizes the common themes of the articles in this issue, centering around politics, information access, and navigating oppression across various geographies. Hence, the lead title, “Navigating ‘Here’” conveys the diversity of information spaces worldwide. This issue features five research papers from Brazil, Indonesia, Ukraine, and the United States, illustrating ways in which information is promoted, advocated, and navigated to confront inequitable access, information barriers, and political oppression.

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## Navigating “Here”

As social media and traditional media continue to converge, it is becoming more apparent that literacy practices with technology invoke communal information spaces. Daily news events have become perennially global and subject to change at any moment due to an internationally collective response that is primarily digital in its delivery (McPhail, 2014). Through these digital information spaces, knowledge sharing has become transparent yet simultaneously nebulous, causing community-based activists and educators to be even more vigilant in vetting credible data and information so that citizens can navigate their daily lives equitably and justly. Libraries, archives, museums, schools, and cultural centers have long honored how communities' embodied practices use and shape these information spaces as collective spheres of knowledge, helping people confirm their physical, geographical, and intellectual place in the world.

The papers in this issue come at a time when our world is involved in heated elections, burning climates, and scalding events (wars) that may lead to a boiling point in the coalition of the human community. These papers confirm that societal politics is a common denominator in how information spaces are redefined based on local communities of practice and their access to materials and services. Just as the recent pandemic was a reflective time in many ways, once again, for the library and information science (LIS) field, we are (re)considering ways to share information to build relationships within communities fairly, openly, and with integrity.



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Research in this issue comes from five countries across four continents: Ukraine, Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, and the USA. The collective work poses questions such as: What do information practices look like in digital realms? Who are we as citizens of a digital diaspora? What are we LIS scholars concerned about when questioning and resolving life’s questions with community members in diverse information spaces?

Scholars and practitioners seek information liberation - the freedom to critically navigate geographies where information is operationalized to progress community life (Durrani, 2008; Martin, 1998; Jordan, 2015). For example, this issue features research narratives about rural communities exploring information practices with technology like social media, ICT, and STEM applications in rural Brazil, informational justice for social security in Ukraine, and navigating critical geographies of information access and dissemination for the Latinx digital diaspora.

Indeed, Shannon Oltmann and Fatima Espinoza-Vasquez begin this issue with their research on social media affordances and how they play a crucial role in mediating the formation of a digital diaspora among Latinx immigrants in the United States. The authors posit that confidentiality, connectivity, creativity, interactivity, spreadability, and visibility enable immigrants to connect and maintain ties with their country of origin. Oltmann and Espinoza-Vasquez show how Latinx immigrants leverage social media for communication, creative expression, and reinforcing their national and local identities. Their study emphasizes how affordances such as creativity and spreadability foster significant connections and community-building within the Latinx digital diaspora. Oltmann and Espinoza-Vasquez recommend that future research can further explore the intricate relationship between social media platforms and the formation of digital diasporas.

Anis Karunia Uswatan Hasanah, Fitri Mutia, and Norhuda Salleh conducted a study across seven state universities in Indonesia to explore 37 visually disabled students’ experiences with library anxiety within a university context in the Global South. The research utilized the Malay Version of Bostick’s Library Anxiety Scale to measure barriers with service providers, affective boundaries, and comfort with library technology. The findings revealed that visually disabled students faced low levels of library anxiety, particularly concerning navigating the library facility while engaging with technology. Interestingly, male students exhibited higher levels of library anxiety than female students. The study emphasizes the importance of exploring disabled students’ experiences with library anxiety to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers to create more inclusive information spaces.

Oleg Yaroshenko conducted a research project with colleagues Olga I. Demenko, Nataliia O. Melnychuk, Volodymyr M. Harashchuk, and Roman Ye. Prokopiev that explores the inclusivity of social protection and security issues for disabled citizens in Ukraine. Yaroshenko et al. report that in Ukraine, the state plays a crucial role in ensuring inclusive social security through education, employment, healthcare, social services, infrastructure development, and legal protection for people with disabilities. The research team shares that for disabled Ukrainian citizens, public service entities like NGOs and civil society organizations contribute information for awareness-raising, education, program implementation, policy advocacy, and social integration. Yaroshenko et al. cite challenges such as lack of access to services, limited infrastructure, and paternalistic state assistance as barriers to protecting the information rights of people with disabilities.

Silva-Lopes and Leal present their community-based research with women in quilombos (i.e., rural Black communities in Brazil that emerged with the emancipation of enslaved Africans as a

resistance against oppression and social inequality). Silva Lopes and Leal report that today, quilombo territories are still marked by social inequality, limited access to essential services, and digital exclusion. Their research examined the complex digital oppressions of 35 Quilombola women living in rural Brazil. The study gives voice to the Quilombola women; their quotes convey their challenges accessing digital technologies for work, education, and health care. Silva-Lopes and Leal emphasize how digital discrimination impacts women’s education, health, and social participation, stressing how equitable access to information and communication technologies (ICT) is crucial for societal participation, with Internet access recognized as a human right.

Dreeszden Bowman also investigates the impacts of social forces on the everyday information practices of citizens in rural spaces: their study seeks to understand how LGBTQ+ communities in rural enclaves in the US resist localized power dynamics. This research discusses how LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those residing in rural areas, face challenges accessing relevant information and resources due to the focus on LGBTQ+ organizations located in urban cities. Dreeszden Bowman studied the online interactions of rural queer people on the Facebook group, Queer Exchange, to highlight how queer communities navigate information sharing, especially in rural settings, to support one another and thrive. The author interviewed 12 participants to learn about the usefulness of the Facebook group as an information space and resource for navigating daily living. The study combines information science with the study of queer spaces to shed light on the importance of understanding queer spatiality, information practices, and community building in rural contexts to support the thriving of LGBTQ+ individuals in underserved communities.

Essraa Nawar and Kristin Laughtin-Dunker’s report-from-the-field shares ways that a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) librarian, a marketing librarian, and a scholarly communications librarian collaborated to advance diversity efforts in their U.S.-based academic library via a blog series, virtual exhibits, bibliographies, discussion panels, and workshop series. The librarians use various online platforms to promote BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)- and gender-focused events and activities. Library staff collaborated with local stakeholders to present a women’s panel about Sikh culture to highlight the cultural group’s traditions. Nawar and Laughtin-Dunker’s report demonstrates how faculty and staff can work together with community members to provide consistent opportunities for library users to be exposed to and appreciate diverse cultures, histories, and traditions.

In this issue, we share two book reviews of publications that will significantly impact the library, information science, and archival studies fields. The first review is by LIS doctoral scholar Yingying Han for the 2023 publication *Decolonizing Archival Futures*, authored by Canadian archivists and public historians Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey. Ms. Han reports that *Decolonizing Archival Futures* discusses the significance of honoring Indigenous protocols as a must-do approach to confronting “western archival norms and colonial ethics.” Covering Indigenous archival protocols from four countries: the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, McCracken and Hogan-Stacey provide valuable insights into ways to reimagine archival practices as decolonized frameworks that center relationship building with Indigenous communities to contest cultivated norms in archivy. The authors invoke a vision of decolonized archives where librarians and archivists actively embed Indigenous ways of being and knowing into their work that is “community-driven and Indigenous-led ... to decolonize history and research” (McCracken & Hogan-Stacey, 2023, p. 62).

Shelly Black, a digital archivist with North Carolina State University (USA), offers a compelling review of Dr. Tonia Sutherland’s (of UCLA’s archives program) debut publication, *Resurrecting the Black Body: Race and the Digital Afterlife*, also published in 2023. Ms. Black conveys that Sutherland offers a new lens for considering digitized visual records of historical trauma and contemporary oppressions affecting Black Americans and the Black Diaspora as a continued representation of the Black/African embodiment of collective experience. Black asserts that *Resurrecting the Black Body* “is a significant contribution to information science discourse that critically re-examines archival practices like mass digitization and custodianship, particularly in an age where an unprecedented volume of user-generated content and personal data is shared and commodified on digital platforms.” Both reviewers hail these publications as invaluable additions to archival and library science studies.

### Conclusion

This issue addresses crucial questions about the ongoing evolution of our information spaces in library, archival, and information contexts and settings. Given the constant changes in our social, political, and global landscapes, LIS scholars and practitioners are taking the opportunity to explain how they navigate their work to address significant gaps in knowledge and information practices throughout the geographies in which LIS professionals work. This compilation conveys a collective message that progress is being made to address the challenges we face as we navigate the “here” and now of information spaces as a collaborative community united by the goal of creating inclusive landscapes for equitable and just knowledge building, sharing, and exchange.

In response to, or despite, global geopolitical tensions, information communities of practice are coming together to share their knowledge in ways that highlight the significance of embodied understanding and practices for societal well-being. In community-based contexts, LIS professionals continue learning to leverage collective approaches to operationalizing information into a communal sphere of knowledge. Thus, when we collaboratively navigate our “here,” we create opportunities to center our points of connection within society’s pillars of education, health, and informational wellbeing.

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