

Even Flood, Bibliotekforum 6, 2005

US Library of Congress and its international portals

The US Library of Congress is a huge and valuable resource that is often overlooked; at least I have to confess to that sin myself. However, it is a very comprehensive and valuable source, also for people living outside the US. The website, at www.loc.gov has a very large collection of services, and it is by no means limited to the holdings in the Library.

The library of Congress has more than 130 million items (books, records and videos) in all subjects and languages, the LOC online catalogue covers 12 million of these.

Non-English authors are very well represented; a short test for Norwegian authors revealed they have even quite recent material. I assume that also goes for authors from other nations. Music lovers will find recordings there with lists of performers and composers listed, all of which are searchable. In short, for verifying objects, finding bibliographies or getting an overview, it is a first rate site. LC subject terms are comprehensive and searchable, and that makes it even more easy to use. Of course getting the materials itself is another question and much more difficult! But at least we know where it is. And one more thing, if you want the data for your catalogue you can get the posts in MARC format.

For an international audience, the two international internet portals LC offers should also be of great interest. The first is Global Gateway, international.loc.gov/intld/intldlhome.html. It offers several services. The Country Studies Series is a series of in depth studies of nations around the world. The series is not complete by far. None of the Scandinavian nations are there, the closest is Finland. But for those nations that are included, we get a very comprehensive file with history, sociology, geography and other subjects. Portals of the World, www.loc.gov/rr/international/portals.html, is a collection of links to sources from nations. There are far more nations here than in the country studies, but the sources of information are from national sites which have been selected by LOC as being the most representative.

So the information is limited to the contents of the local sites. They are sorted by subject; the entry for Norway has nineteen different subject headings. As one would expect, there are holes, so it is not exhaustive. To take a local example, under Norway, Library and Archives there is no link to the Norwegian library catalogues or to the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority (ABM-Utvikling). And others links are also out of date, so although this is a very good resource, it is suffering from the bane of all Internet portals: the net changes too fast for indexers to keep up. The links are selected by the different research teams at LC. A link to the teams can be found at www.loc.gov/rr/research-centers.html.

The second important international LOC portal is the the Law Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/law/public/law.html. This site is dedicated to finding legal information from all over the world. The most important links here for people outside the US are to International and Multinational Laws and to Nations of the World. The first leads to a series of links to multinational reference works for international laws and treaties, including the United Nations. Nations of the World links to national sites for legal information from all nations (Or I guess I should say almost all, I have found no holes, but...). Here the sources are the individual national sites, so content can vary widely from nation to nation. And the usual caveats about link rot apply as well. But still, it is an excellent starting point for finding legal sources from all over the world. However with one notable and glaring omission – there are no links to the legal works of the European Union. This is a bit astonishing, considering the importance of the EU and its directives, court decisions and regulations. However, as there are other excellent sources for EU law, this information can be found elsewhere. But that is another story.