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Oral history  
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**0. Please tell us about your college education, where and what. What did you intend to be in your youthful studies?**

I was born in Tours, France, in August 1942. I studied at Lycée Descartes in Tours and from 1957 when we moved to Paris, at Lycée Janson de Sailly. I originally wanted to be an army officer because my mother, who had been in the Resistance, raised me with a strong sense of service to the Nation. I spent quite a time in what was then known as pre-military service. But the convulsions of the Algeria war made me realize that there is a big gap between ideal and reality. I quickly gave up preparation of the military school and went to the Institute of Political Studies of Paris, better known as "Sciences Po". I did a Master in Public administration taking electives mostly on international subjects, especially those related to the Third World. After graduating in 1962, I did one further year preparing for the entry exam of the national school of public administration, ENA. I failed, fortunately. I did not feel like becoming a "high level" civil servant nor any kind of servant. I did not try a second chance.

**1. How did you become interested in Information Science**

By accident. In 1965, having terminated my military obligations, I went to work as a junior auditor in a bank. My first job. Towards the end of the year a friend told me that there was an opening in his organization. He did not know exactly what the job was about, but for sure, he said, more fun than what you do now. So I went and was recruited.

The organization, a French para-statal, called SMUH, specialized in urban planning in "developing countries", needed an officer to be its contribution to a national program whose aim was to build a national information system on housing and town planning, and secondarily lead a project of the United Nations to develop an international information system on the same subjects. All French organizations in the sector were supposed to participate in this joint effort.

I had no idea what "documentation" was. But as a graduate from "Sciences Po", I assumed, like anyone seems to do in France, that I was competent for any job in any subject. At that time, mid-sixties, there was no graduate education in France for documentation, much less information science.

I spent a few months observing what the documentation center of my organization was doing and participating in its activities. Another significant part of my time was devoted to meeting with heads of other centers and key figures of the field and learning from them. In the mean time, discussions for the building of the national team and program were going on. But rather quickly it became clear that the project will not be started. A rather embarrassing situation.

My supervisor and I came to the conclusion that, OK forget the national project, but there is the international one, of which France had been the proponent and for which it made some commitment.

Thus let's proceed with the international information system on housing, town and regional planning. Fun isn't it?

At that time, 1966, cooperative international information systems were emerging as a new concept. The first system of this kind, INIS, the nuclear information system under the UN International Atomic Energy Agency was started in 1966 and became operational in 1970.

Here we went. At the end of the year an international conference which I organized launched the project. Efforts towards the design and organization of the system ran for 3 more years. As one may expect, the project was ably spoiled by office politics. When we reached the stage of actual implementation, though on a limited scale, support from the French ministries for the original scheme had vanished. I left.

I would like to add a special tribute to my supervisor at SMUH, Michel Courtier. He gave me free hand and total support, in addition to good advice. Few beginners have such a chance. When I met for the first time Felix Sviridov, then secretary general of the International Federation for Documentation (FID), at an international conference, he greeted me saying " But, but, Mr. Menou, you are ... so young". What may show that no one would expect a greenhorn of that sort to be in charge of such a project. I was 24.

## **2. What were the most significant steps in your career**

Allow me first of all to say that I had no career but a life. I do not like the notion of career. It stands for a course of events one plans in order to move as quickly as possible from a starting point, presumed low level, to the highest level possible. Using eventually of any trick in order to secure the climb. And reach the fall. In most instances at the expense of others. I feel alien to the underlying notions of race, competition, struggle and self-concern. I simply tried to do things which, rightly or wrongly, I considered to be of social value and interesting. I took them as they came. And I also rejected or stopped those which, in my view, were requiring unacceptable compromise with ethical concerns. Of course, action in social settings cannot proceed without some flexibility and patience. But there are limits. It may take time to figure out whether the good will offset the bad. But beware of waiting too long and lining up with the accomplices.

Preserving freedom and intellectual honesty remained an absolute goal. Some will say that it is an arrogant, stupid and foolish attitude; for sure. However, being able to recognize at the end of the day that one kept wrong doings to a minimum, if not avoided them, is more worth than any promotion or pay rise. One has to be ready to pay the price for it.

My itinerary is thus marked off by a series of resignations. From the first project when it was overturned. From a UNESCO project in Africa which, as "chief technical adviser" in the language of that time, I suspended, in practice canceled, when it became clear after five months that no national staff will be appointed. From FAO when realizing that I felt ashamed to follow path of official practices of that time. From a university which was cheating its students and misbehaving with faculty. To some extent, these events remain as positive landmarks in my memory.

My itinerary from 1966 to 2011 can be split in 5 somewhat distinct phases:

1966 - 1969 Initial step

1970 - 1988 UN assignments

1989 - 1994 Transition  
1994 - 2004 Turning mostly academic  
2005 - 2011 Last run

### UN assignments 1970 - 1988

My first assignment, which I briefly described earlier, was clearly critical in connecting me with the international arena. During the following 18 years I worked as an independent consultant, with a few exceptions, mostly with UNESCO, the United Nations Organization for education, science and culture, and FAO, the United Organization for Food and Agriculture. I had to deal with a variety of assignments from specific topics related to the operation of documentation centers to the design and management of national information systems, national information policies, etc. Either as part of the assignments just mentioned, or under specific ones in this area, education and training of information professionals and information users were the other dominant topic. During this period, my lasting involvement in two projects in Tunisia and Brazil were of special significance.

Short term consultancies, usually of one month, were imposing technical recommendations without creating the conditions for their actual implementation in an ambient for which they were aggressive, as right as they might have been. I never forgot an incident during the wrap up session of my first mission. A particularly short one. We helped a documentation center in Morocco installing a modern storage and retrieval system based upon an advanced technology of that time, peek-a-boo. Suddenly in the middle of the review, a Moroccan documentalist entered in a nervous crisis close to hysteria, shouting "we re human beings, how can you ask us to spend most of our time punching little holes in a cardboard sheet". It took a long time to calm her. She was the most clever staff member. Her reaction left me totally astonished. Being able to become part of the social group, establishing trust, moving step by step, and, above all, building self-confidence and increasing competence among the national staff is in my view the key to effective cooperation.

I worked in Tunisia 4 years and in Brazil 5 years, close to half time through series of missions. In the latter case, Brazil, I developed in a scheme of part time project management by which the national staff was keeping total responsibility. The adviser role returning to its basic nature: provide exposure to a broader range of experience, counsels, help, encouragement and an external eye in monitoring and evaluation. I was spending between one and two months in the project, then moving to missions elsewhere before returning for a new round. In addition, I must say that the team I worked with was simply splendid with regard to its competence, dedication, hard work, willingness to learn and achieve the goals. Especially under such difficult constraints that prevailed in the country at the time.

The other central component of my activity during this period was education and training. It took the form of in service training for the staff of the operational project. But I also was hired to give regular courses at institutions of higher education, run or participated in seminars and workshops, give occasional lectures. Part of this activity was geared at users. In particular I was involved in a series of workshops in East Africa organized by the German Foundation for International Development. They were directed at professional staff in public administration and dealt with the role of information in development planning. In fact we were talking of information management before this concept emerged.

When documentation units started to be set up in developing countries, the recruitment of staff was based upon subject expertise, conditions permitting. This was in line with the concept of scientific and technical documentation on the one hand, and a consequence of the lack of higher education

institutions which could have offered a suitable basic education in information science. The staff was thus mostly trained in service through ad-hoc courses. This prevented the incumbents to gain a comprehensive vision of information work and their mission. I convinced the UNISIST division of UNESCO to produce a primer in order to fill this gap. Known as "General introduction to the techniques of information and documentation work" the book which I produced jointly with my friend and colleague Claire Guinchat, turned to become UNESCO best seller; it was translated in several languages and had a second augmented edition. As a matter of fact my original proposal was to have a loose leaf publication allowing for regular updates and complements but bureaucratic rules imposed to adopt a book format. A few years earlier I had the opportunity to develop a curriculum for the education of documentalists at the Regional school for librarians, archivists and documentalists at the University of Dakar, Sénégal, and launch the corresponding section.

During short term assignments, especially in the field, all energy is devoted to getting the things done in time. Little room is left for leisure or reflexion. It is however important to try and take a critical look not only at the achievements and errors but also try to analyze the processes and elaborate conclusions that may help build better practices. I tried to consider them as action research and did my best to consolidate the experience in publications. Some 30 journal articles, book chapters or conference papers were produced over these years.

More importantly, one of the assignments turned to be a significant piece of research. At an UNISIST workshop on information policies, Vladimir Slamecka had stressed that assessment of the situation of countries regarding information were based upon general measures such as GNP while an information specific measure would in principle be desirable, should it prove more on target. I developed a proposal for investigating this issue which the UNISIST Division of UNESCO accepted. The project was carried out jointly with Harold Borko and the support of UCLA Graduate school of information science. It began with a feasibility study. A first phase followed during which a test of the proposed system was conducted on Latin American countries and a selection of industrialized countries. A second phase would have consisted of a full scale exercise for all countries. As is too often the case, office politics and general administrative constraints prevented this step to be implemented. The reports remained in the UNESCO archives without any significant dissemination.

The system called Index of information utilization potential (IUP) was a flexible set of structural and functional measurements with 3 levels of aggregation. More than a quantitative picture of the situation in the considered countries, the composite indexes were meant as a tool for guiding systematic analysis in the formulation of information policies. Since I was involved during this period in assisting the Brazilian institute of scientific and technical information with the preparation of a national information policy, we had the opportunity to test the instrument in real conditions. It was found quite useful for debugging the confusion and vagueness which characterize the facts and opinions related to information in this context. Much later Victor Montviloff who had produced guidelines for the formulation of information policies as staff member of the UNESCO Division of the General Information Program, told me privately on the occasion of a workshop which we both attended "Too bad that we did not pursue this project, it was full of good ideas". Some 20 years after the project a number of overall measurements began to be published by various organizations, all claiming to be the first of the kind.

Short term consultancies fed a sense of impotence to the extent I thought, wrongly, that they did not allow for an appropriate control over their definition and more importantly continuing support of the efforts initiated on their occasion. Conversely I assumed that a position at headquarters would allow for a more effective control. When my friend and colleague Alice Basset, with whom I worked for

many years, had to leave her post at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, due to age limit, I accepted to take the job. It was a somewhat exceptional position combining administrative and technical responsibilities, which were normally split. Within the Division of the library and information systems, I was responsible for the FAO projects dealing with agricultural information systems, in particular national systems. This covered project formulation, technical back stopping, administration, monitoring and evaluation. When I began the unit had 12 on-going documentation projects and 8 active information components in the projects of other Divisions. When I left they were respectively 18 and 33. The total budget for the field activities was below 500,000 \$ in 1985 and was twice as high for 1989.

Continuing the efforts initiated by Mrs. Basset, who was the first holder of the post, standard procedures for the briefing and debriefing of consultants, for project monitoring and for reporting were developed; a number of young information professionals from developing countries were hired to undertake consultancies. Innovative methods of action-training were designed in order to foster the development of national networks at the initiative of colleagues in charge of such networks and consultants, especially Aline Lisette-Vidal and Danielle Haeringer. Worth a special mention is the shift toward national data bases as the first step in building resources. This had been the practice in countries like Morocco, Brazil and Tunisia but the prevalence of the international data bases AGRIS and CARIS was putting the flow in many centers up-side down. They were sending their input to the Agris processing center in Vienna, Austria, and getting back their production together with the one of all other members. Fine, except for the delay. French organizations, CIRAD and ORSTOM (now IRD) which were supporting information systems in developing countries worked at a format for national data bases (called BABINAT) and I took part in this effort. It was subject to harsh criticism by the AGRIS coordination which had no intention to revise its work-flow, even though BABINAT was fully compatible with AGRIS. A few years later, AGRIS offered a format for national data bases. Another interesting exercise was the attempt, at the initiative of an exceptionally farsighted UNDP Resident Representative, to inventory all information systems components in all international co-operation projects in the country and convince them to combine their efforts, harmonize standards and equipment and such sort of things. As one may expect, the attempt "succeeded with failure" as my friend Karin Delgado uses to say.

These four years were exciting. I was spending roughly half of my time in the field and the other half in Rome. Within the unit, which was an informal arrangement within the division, I had only one administrative assistant and one part time secretary, a wonderful one fortunately. So it was really hard work. The position did not however allow for the kind of continuing support of local efforts I had dreamed of. Bureaucratic constraints and the work load left little room for initiatives. Towards the end of my contract there was once again one of these episodic financial crisis in the organization. I only had to take note that the eventual renewal of my contract had not been notified within the specified delay. In fact I had more than enough. I needed fresh air.

#### Transition 1989 - 1994

Among the many frustrations of my time in Rome was the impossibility to carry out personal work, produce papers, attend conferences, etc. Having settled back in France I thus tried to combine consultancies with working at my PhD and doing some ground work. My dissertation was sort of wrap up of my experience regarding information management in developing countries, supported by my earlier publications. I received my PhD early in 1993.

A major effort was a project carried out with my friend Thiendou Niang for the E.U./A.C.P Technical Center for agricultural and rural cooperation (CTA) called PROGEFIA, *General Programme for Education in Agricultural Information*. The idea was to catalyze cooperation for the education and training of agricultural information specialists and users among all organizations active in this area. A reference framework was offering a matrix for seamlessly connecting the various contributions. Much emphasis was put on the development of material for distance education. Despite the interest shown by many potential partners and beneficiaries, the project did not reach the implementation phase. At this time, distance education in developing countries was seen as unrealistic. Many ideas articulated in the PROGEFIA project became much later reality, for instance in the iMark program coordinated by FAO.

Another important development was the launch in 1992 of a study of the impact of information on development. It was prompted by the concern expressed by Martha Stone, then Director general of the information sciences and systems division of the Canadian IDRC (International Development Research Center), to find ways to show which contribution to development the programs supporting information activities were making. The first phase which ran over 1992 and 1993 was based upon a structured computer conference (July-December 1992) of which I was the moderator.. A group of 16 specialists from all parts of the world was selected by IDRC to take part in the exercise. It was concluded by a report presenting the consolidated insights of the group and proposals for further investigation. The report was published as a book for sale over too long a period before becoming freely available on the web. One more case of short-sighted policies of effective financial management. The second phase was expected to test these ideas in field projects. Funding did not allow for designing specific projects. Instead impact study components were added to a variety of existing projects which had declared interest for such an extension.

During this period, I was also involved in a number of other activities such as:

- finalization and promotion of the reference format for national bibliographic data bases, BABINAT;
- study of French information resources for development with a view to make their use more effective and responsive to real needs and conditions in the countries supposed to benefit from them (another frustrating goal);
- Participating in the organization of an international conference on science indicators for developing countries, giving continuation of the efforts initiated by the late Michael Moravcsick some 10 years earlier.

I would like to mention here that from 1992 I served during 3 years as external examiner for the Department of Library and Information Studies, University of Botswana, whose director was then my dear friend Professor Peter Havard-Williams. We managed to squeeze in the rather formal process a good deal of unconstrained brainstorming and issue driven discussions with the entire faculty. It was a unique experience.

#### Turning Mostly academic 1994 - 2004

I eventually got an appointment as associate professor in an under-graduate program in business information in a French university which I would not dare to ever name. Placement was becoming a serious problem in the country for these young professionals due to the overall economic situation and lack of recognition of information professionals. These programs were quite traditional. The internet was terra incognita. I thus pushed for a revamping of the contents of the program towards Internet based services which could be a unique advantage for the students in their job seeking. It was quite fun to explain how to use the Internet on a blackboard since there was no connection at the beginning. I

introduced a few other unusual practices, like teaching one course in English or evaluation of courses including faculty, by the students. I soon was caught in a bureaucratic trap which let me no option but resignation.

Three years later I was hired by the Department of information science at City University, London (U.K.) as part time professor of information policy. Despite the constraints of being the "Eurostar professor" as David Nicholas, the head of the Department, put it, it was a most enjoyable experience (except for the train delays at that time). As one may expect information policy was not the most popular elective course. Thanks to Ian Rowlands who was co-leader of the course, the mix of national and international, theoretical and practical concerns was in my view quite unique. I also gave lectures in other courses. My concerns were probably far too exotic for research proposals to win in highly competitive contests. After 4 years financial shortages led to a freeze of temporary contracts right when mine should have been renewed. This coincided with a change of head of Department. After a couple of years I sort of vanished from the Department's radar screen.

During the period I had the opportunity to give regular courses in information science at the Catholic University of the West, in Angers (major town near my village) and occasional ones in a number of French universities including INTD/CNAM, Universities of Angers, Lower Brittany, Paris 7, Toulouse 2, ENST Brittany. A quite exciting endeavor was teaching an online a course in Spanish (a language I did not learn) on social management of ICT projects in a distance MA program under FLACSO Ecuador. After a couple of weeks one of the students stressed that there had been more interaction in that course than in the entire program of which it was almost the last course. Unfortunately, international support for the program was not continued. Do I carry the evil's eye?.

Research activities were focused till 1999 on continuing involvement in the Impact of information study. In particular I led the investigation launched by Nancy Hafkin, then at the UN Economic Commission for Africa, of the impact of electronic communications in Africa. Most of my work was done at distance with the national investigators. We had a few face to face meetings. This was the first study of its kind. A challenging one since the design was based upon the use of store and forward technology while full internet access became available in most places towards the end of the project. I was later involved in the review of proceedings and findings of four of the eight projects which were carried in this phase and the synthesis of lessons learned. Changes within IDRC did not allow for consolidating the outcome of this effort and develop a suitable methodology for monitoring and evaluating the impact of information. Relying upon the standard statements like "it is clear", "we believe" etc. is clearly more comfortable for all those who set to promote information for development, aka information technology infrastructures.

To some extent my other main activities in the last part of this period can be regarded as a follow up of the "impact" study. This included first participating in a project called "El Salvador learning society". It attempted at formulating national development strategies based upon mechanisms for expanding and capitalizing upon intangible assets. It was also designed as a participatory exercise. Even though limitations in resources and more radically time did not allow for reaping all contemplated benefits, it was rather successful and obviously exciting. It was probably the first project of its kind. I fear it is so far the only one. It may be interesting to note that this innovative enterprise was in part a result of the discussions in the first Global Knowledge conference, a major portion of which was conducted online. A side effect of the project was the launch of a program for establishing a national network of telecentres, as opposed to the two or three pilot telecentres initially contemplated. As usual political changes and bureaucratic factors prevented the proposed strategies to be further implemented in a coherent manner.

I later on became an active participant in an open online forum organized by Daniel Pimienta, president of Funredes, called MISTICA (Methodology and Social Impact of Information and Communication Technologies in America). It attempted a thorough questioning of the role of ICT in social transformation of Latin America and the Caribbean, while in parallel experiencing methods for on-line and face to face multilingual and computer aided conferencing. This exercise was supported by Canada's IDRC. It assembled a vibrant community which put much emphasis on social readiness and relevance, as opposed to mere access, as a key to the effective use of ICT. In parallel, a project also funded by IDRC and implemented by Funredes tried to develop concepts and methods for evaluating the social impact of ICT in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean. I served in the steering committee of this project. This was an occasion to try and turn the table related to the dominant discourse and practice about monitoring and evaluation of ICT projects. The challenge is to look at the accomplishments in relation to the context and requirements of the population supposed to benefit from ICT deployment and to have the communities effectively and directly involved in the assessment. I had a few other opportunities to elaborate on these concepts which obviously were not received with much enthusiasm by the institutional players in the development system.

A last major involvement was my participation as member of the steering committee and later adviser to the board of the association in the establishment of the network of telecentres in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as Somos Telecentros. This effort evolved from an initial attempt at taking stock of the telecenters experience in the region. The local leaders quickly realized that rather than a snapshot, what was necessary was a framework allowing for the sharing of experience among the actors. This effort was supported by Canada's IDRC. Near the completion of the the project we presented a portofolio of activities aiming at strengthening the telecentres deployment in the region and their association. One should bear in mind that the telecentres movement at that time was a strong advocate for free and open software (FOS). Somos proposals were not accepted by the donor. Which later on made a deal with a major ICT supplier in order to develop a global organization of telecenters. Or was the deal set the other way round ? Any how many of the proposed functions and activities which Somos had formulated were adopted by the new organization. Except for a truly democratic organization of the community. Somos succeeded in maintaining a fair level of activity during several years. But progressively competing national groupings emerged which were supported by the new organization. Worth noticing is the fact that the issue of FOS progressively disappeared from the agenda of telecenters.

Another aspect of my involvement with telecenters during this period and part of the following one was contributing to the setting up and functioning of the Community informatics research network. This was among others an interesting case in conflict between virtual and real organization.

#### Last run 2005 - 2011

In 2006 I was appointed as visiting professor of the Department of information studies at the University College London (UK). This was more an honorary position. It resulted in few opportunities for joint work. I continued running a seminar on international aspects of information systems and services in the master in information science at the Catholic University of the West. I also lectured on Information policies at the University of Marne la Vallée. An exciting opportunity occurred in 2009. I had the chance to teach online a course on public information policies at San José State University.

My collaboration with Somos Telecentros moved into a broader arena. I got involved in attempts at structuring partnerships at the level of the Americas (North and South) and even a global

one. The idea was to allow for grassroots telecenters organizations to have access to global policy making arenas, such as the World Summit of the information society, and be able to raise their voice. A parallel effort was related to the development of a platform allowing seamless e-commerce functions for telecentres. The hidden forces that preserve the status quo were obviously stronger.

I also did a couple of consultancies.

The illness of my lady and later the shock of her death and absence after sharing our lives for more than 40 years led me to progressively stop professional activities.

### **3. What in your opinion did you contribute to the field ?**

Di I ? Can anyone claim a unique personal contribution ? Is not it amusing to hear claims of being the "father" or "inventor" of this or that, e.g. the Internet or the Web. There should be a compulsory statement in the acceptance speeches of all the prizes, awards, etc. "This was a collective effort and I am happy to take the pride for myself". These beauty contests are yet another mechanism to enforce competition and inequality as an essential component of society. The best one can do is to take a fair part in an effort which is in essence collective.

So, what did I, with others, brought to the movement ? Well I intended, and hope I did, bring a focus on the social and cultural dimensions of the information and knowledge cycle. What calls for sticking to complexity and holistic approaches. As a complement, I helped the accomplishments, requirements and visions of actors in the so called developing countries to receive more attention. Unfortunately these are not subjects that attract highest attention. These concerns prompted my involvement, among other things, in FID, the International federation for information and documentation, ASIS&T's SIG/III and International relations committee.

Most of the work we have been doing in the 70's and 80's regarding national information systems, policies, etc. seems to have vanished. Information as contents has been absorbed, not to say destroyed, by information and communication technology applications. We can only hope that the principles of ordering and social relevance upon which they relied will sooner or later regain attention. It seems however that for the time being anything "pre-Internet" is simply ignored.

May I add something ? If long after one has left, a former student or colleague, tells her/his co-workers, or students, something like: "You know folks, long ago I worked with a guy by name of so&so. He was a strange and difficult character. But, gosh, we did a great job and we had fun." Then one's life was not totally useless. I cross fingers for this to happen to me.

### **4. Can you tell us of colleagues who were most influential in your work ?**

So many. I don't want to draw a kind of authors index of the encyclopedia of information science. But, OK, let's name a few, with apologies for those my flagging memory will leave out at this time. This is going to sound like those long litanies of thanks by Oscar recipients. Sorry.

Alexander Mikhailov, the director of VINITI and chair of FID committee on the theory of information who accepted my first paper despite its dreadful form and language, and whose concept of "informatics" was a major source of inspiration. I must probably add his principal collaborators

Ruggero Gilyarevski and Arkadi Tchernyi. Considering information theory and attempts at devising holistic frameworks, Tony Debons also deserves special acknowledgement.

Peter Lazar who offered my first UNESCO consultation and helped during many years with his good advice. Gerald Dubois, head of FAO Library and Information systems Division, who showed me how to run international consultancies, trusted and supported me over the years through repeated assignments. Jacques Tocatlian, UNESCO General information program, was no less important in sharing views and creating opportunities for important developments such as the General introduction to information work or the IUP study.

Hal Borko who dragged me in the editorial board of Information Processing and Management and was always available to discuss any subject. Not to mention his concept of information science, arguments about indexing theory and inclination toward system approaches

Brenda Dervin whose sense making methodology was a major inspiration but no less importantly for being such a unique person.

Bob Taylor for his comprehensive vision of the social nature of information. An essential building block to which Manfred Kochen also contributed a lot. I should mention in this context Gladys Adda, the pioneer of documentation in Tunisia and Kingo Mchombu for his insights into rural information needs and use in Africa. Kjeld Klintøe (head of Danish Technological information service) was instrumental in introducing me into organizational constraints and what was not yet known as information management, an area in which I am also much indebted to Woody Horton. He also played a decisive role in the impact study, not to mention his comforting emails late in the night.

Tefko Saracevic whose views are relevant in most parts of information science, but also for demonstrating that international concerns are relevant too and not necessarily undermining one's reputation.

Peter Havard-Williams showed me how to positively make a critical judgment over local situations in the so-called developing world and the relative appropriateness of the advanced techniques. He was even more important as a living demonstration of how to be a change agent by virtue of example and empathy. Nasser Sharify is another outstanding case in point.

In relation to information use, users and information literacy, as special tribute is obviously due to Tom Wilson and also to colleagues in the FID Education and training committee especially Wojciech Pirog and Eric Pietsch.

When considering national systems and policies Vladimir Slamecka is the person I owe most, especially in relation to his work in Egypt. Scott Adams comes next to my mind starting with his role in the UNISIST feasibility study and further implementation. Another key figure is Carl Keren, the Director of Israel scientific and technical information center. Toni Carbo, particularly when she was in charge of NCLIS, offered an outstanding example of the way to deal with information policy.

Pioneers of measurements of information societies Fritz Machlup, Derek de Sola Price, Ithiel de Sola Pool, Marc Porat and Michael Rubin obviously were essential. As was Donald Lamberton not only for opening the door of information economy but also for the breadth and depth of his vision.

A special salute should go to Barbara Flood for articulating a concept of what it is to be an

educator, full of practical insights but more importantly, a farsighted and non-conventional philosophy.

Although I already mentioned her, Alice Basset with whom I worked in many instances and more regularly when she was in Tunisia and later my predecessor at FAO headquarters. She showed me how to keep a project running. The harder and more intense the work, the more fun and laugh. Great lesson.

Last but not least; I'd like to stress that among the inspiring colleagues are all the professionals with whom I worked, often under severe constraints, in so many countries. They demonstrated exceptional professional and human values, to which they stick, day after day. The little I did, it's because of them and with them. I cannot mention all but let me at least briefly mention the CONACYT team of Mexico gathered around Guillermo Fernandez de la Garza, the SNIDA and later IBICT teams of Brazil gathered around Yone Chasquinet, the Coletivo digital team in São Paulo, Brazil, around Beá Tibiriçá, the Fundación Chasquinet team around Karin Delgadillo, in Quito, Ecuador, the Moroccan CND team around Ahmed Fassi-Fihri, the Tunisian CNDA team around Ali Rohmdane. All the humble professional information specialists who I cannot mention individually here; they are also a source of inspiration and strength. They are good people, gente boa. I love you folks. Thank you!

Oh yes, the negative examples should also be mentioned. Yes. They show what one would not want to look like. What one would not like to do, at any cost, for whatever return. And in this regard they help constructing a responsible profile. No one escapes that his/her actions make her/him fall in that group one time or another. However some folks are definitely life members of it. Anyway these folks are too numerous to be quoted.

Last word to my master François Rabelais "Science without conscience is the soul's ruin".

## **5. What do you consider as the most significant achievement of information science ?**

Trudi Bellardo Hahn highlighted five major contributions of information science in her President's column. (<http://www.asis.org/Bulletin/Apr-03/BulletinAprMay03.pdf>). She stressed that information science contributed "developments rather than discoveries". The contributions she earmarked are:

- 1 measuring the information explosion
- 2 providing tools for its control
- 3 applying computers to information management
- 4 understanding users and use of information
- 5 formulating national information policies

Fine with me. Even though most of these areas are still a work in progress.

So the question remains: Can information science make the discovery of what constitutes, according to Manfred Kochen, its very subject: "What is the process of knowledge growth ?" Assuming there is a growth. Or rather that there would be a reduction of ignorance. Obviously human kind, or rather its "elite", knows everyday more; but in the mean time the size of its ignorance grows. The more answers one gets, the more new questions emerge. Nothing new under the sun or the moon in this respect. Meanwhile one may question if there is any reduction in the gap between available knowledge and ability to use it wisely. Assuming it is freely and easily accessible, what is far from being the case.

## **6. What was ASIS&T role in this and in your own work ?**

In the foundation period ADI, later ASIS, not yet ASIS&T, was clearly the major if not unique intellectual hub. It had no equivalent elsewhere. Actually there might still be no equivalent. Its publications, in particular ARIST, were the main source of information for information scientists around the world coming from all possible trades. Since then societies, journals and regular conferences proliferated. But ASIS&T has preserved its preeminence as the place from where one can get the broadest and deepest view of the field.

Provided one had the chance to attend an Annual Meeting, one could get introduced to a wide range of theoreticians, researchers and practitioners from a wide range of sectors. Socially it was, and remains, a most open and welcoming group. As one famous character in the society once told me "If I have a problem, I look at the ASIS directory and find the person who can help". To a large extent I got connected through ASIS, though not exclusively. FID was also an important resource.

With regard to the more specific aspects of information systems and services in developing countries, ASIS&T was clearly not of particular help to me. May be it worked the other way around, thanks to the constant efforts of SIG/III.

I joined ASIS in 1968 and was as active as my international work allowed. I observed that there was almost no contributor to the Annual Meetings from outside North America. More generally I felt a need for a hub to connect ASIS&T members to developments in all countries and the international arenas and international colleagues to developments taking place in North America. In 1981 a group of colleagues and I endeavored to set up a special interest group on international information issues, SIG/III. I am satisfied and happy that the SIG attracted over 30 years so many talented and dedicated members and officers who keep working hard. I am happy for them that they were so often recognized with the SIG of the year award. I was also involved in the International relations committee, launching the European Chapter, helping with the European students chapter, and many miscellaneous functions.

I should not forget to mention how much presentations at SIG/CON contributed to my own intellectual formation. It is essential for the progress of the field to maintain a sharp sense of information nonsense.

## **7. What do you see as the main challenges and opportunities for information science ?**

We are supposed to have entered the age of a globalized information society. The opportunities should thus be enormous and unprecedented. Fast evolving technologies bring constantly new tools to produce, store, organize and disseminate information, new practices to access the resources. This should be the golden age for information specialists. In theory.

In practice it's another story. It seems that on the contrary, their contribution to the design of information technologies is marginal, or even nonexistent. Smart systems, robots and generalized access turn information specialists redundant in the eyes of cost-conscious managers.

Attempts at consolidating information science as a specific discipline have not been that successful up to now. If the field exist and has its own institutional structure it is far from being recognized by other disciplines, not to mention the general public. In any case the modern tendency to

turn any subject of investigation into a self-standing scientific discipline is naturally leading to the disintegration of a common core.

We still lack of generally accepted definition of the object, or objects, boundaries, methods, theories and purpose of information science. This is a major defect. Ordinary people as well as specialists all have their particular perception, to which they do not necessarily stick.

In the mean time the technological revolution has whipped off previous efforts at organizing, preserving and disseminating information in a coherent fashion. This trend combined with the continuing explosion of the amount of information produced and circulated result in a chaos much greater than the one which information pioneers of the past centuries tried to overcome.

These threats are daunting. Perhaps are they an unique opportunities at the same time. Sooner or later the need for order in the information universe will regain its fundamental value. May be not for the connected fridges, but who knows. An order constructed by human judgment in view of human culture and cognitive needs rather than automatic statistical inferences and commercial interests.

#### **8. What would you say in order for young people to get excited about a possible career in information science ?**

Should young people look for advice from the generations which spoiled the planet ?

So, what could be exciting ?

If you want to become a researcher, there is fascinating domain awaiting. Discovering the structure and dynamics of KIWAL: knowledge, information, wisdom, action and learning. An universe which is not made of five distinct constituents, but a dynamic structure resulting from their constant interaction and transformation under specific endogenous and exogenous forces.

If you want to be a teacher, showing people how to make sense of information.

If you want to be a practitioner, creating resources that boost creativity and preserve collective memory.

If you have to look elsewhere, you will have learned a lot about what is the core of living organisms' behavior. Together with pretentiousness, food, drinks and sex.

Information science, even more than other fields, may lead to anything providing one quits it. Helmut Arntz, once president of FID, among other things, used to say when asked what his students would become: "Hum, hum, you know, some became State ministers. Hum hum, not worst than others."