Lumping (and Splitting) LAMs: The Story of Grouping Libraries, Archives, and Museums/Regroupement (et division) des BAMs : Histoire du regroupement des bibliothèques, des archives et des musées

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Lumping (and Splitting)
LAMs: The Story of Grouping Libraries, Archives, and Museums

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Abstract: Eviatar Zerubavel’s work on cognitive classifications (“lumping” and “splitting”) provides the theoretical basis for this literature-based review and narrative analysis of works in which libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) are referred to in concert. Different narratives emerge based on whether authors are “insiders” (practitioners) or “outsiders” (including grant-funding agencies, policy makers, or researchers). The story that emerges exposes the influence of institutional and professional practice, digitization, research, policy, funding, and technological determinism in shaping how we talk (and how we subsequently think) about LAMs in the aggregate. Policy rhetoric stands out as a powerful voice focused on the goal of access for all. Gaps in the story around selection, funding, users, and technology are highlighted as areas for future research.

Keywords: convergence, LAMs, cognitive classification, narrative analysis, institutional development

It is by no means a stretch to say that libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) are different types of institutions. They are seen as being “split,” to use Eviatar Zerubavel’s (1996) term, both because they are conceptually different and because they exist as physically separate entities even when they are organized...
within the same overarching structure. For instance, a university might have a museum, a library, and an archive, but it is likely that each will be run relatively autonomously because each employs a different approach to practice. Librarians, archivists, and curators, too, are “split”—each trained in a distinct professional tradition (Trant 2009; Katre 2011; Robinson 2012). It can also be said that people visit libraries, museums, and archives for different reasons: one goes to the library to check out books; to the museum to see exhibitions; and to the archive to access historical or administrative records (Usherwood, Wilson, and Bryson 2005; Robinson 2012). However, as with all things in the information age, it is not uncommon for convergence around digital projects to blur what were once clear and distinct separations between these institutions and professions (Hjørland 2000; Pieterse 2005; Trant 2009; Marty 2010; Duff et al. 2013). In the case of LAMs, one finds in the literature more and more references to collaboration and convergence, suggesting that instead of being split, more and more LAMs are being “lumped,” to use another of Zerubavel’s (1996) terms. That is to say, the lines between the LAMs are blurring as their similarities are emphasized more than their differences. This calls into question not just what LAMs are, and it also reveals our expectations about what we believe they should be in the twenty-first century.

This article investigates the trend of “lumping” LAMs together (Zerubavel 1996). A selection of extant literature that refers to libraries, archives, and museums in concert is analyzed to identify and connect the narratives that emerge around lumping, splitting, and LAMs. The story that emerges exposes the influences of institutional and professional practices, digitization, research, policy, funding, and technological determinism in shaping how we talk (and how we subsequently think) about LAMs in the aggregate. Not surprisingly, the narratives change based on who is telling the story. Here, we see perspectives representing that of “insiders,” meaning LAM practitioners and “outsiders,” including grant-funding agencies, policy makers, and researchers. The focus on narrative uncovers a multi-faceted story about LAM collaboration and convergence that changes as it foregrounds different aspects of practice. In conclusion, gaps in the story are discussed to highlight areas for future research. These include the problem of selection for digitization, the disconnect between policy makers, funders, and practitioners, an absence of in-depth user impact studies of digital collections, and short-sightedness about the role of technology in shaping access to these collections.

**Literature Selection**

A selection of literature is reviewed that refers to LAMs in the aggregate. Diane Zorich, Günter Waibel and Ricky Erway’s (2008) report on the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), entitled “Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration among Libraries, Archives and Museums,” was taken as the starting point because it emerged as a seminal paper during my time as a digital collections librarian in a consortial academic library environment that generated numerous discussions of “LAMs” as well as of “de-siloization.” Additional
searches of Google scholar, library, and information science abstract databases for “libraries, archives, and museums” (in any order) led to additional findings, which were supplemented with footnote chasing and citation searching, comprising the critical mass of literature used in this analysis and review. A grounded theory approach identified the main themes that emerged from within the readings with a focus on how these discussions could be interwoven to construct a more cohesive story about LAMs in the twenty-first century. It begins by presenting Zerubavel’s (1996) ideas about lumping and splitting to situate the article in a theoretical context.

LAMs and Zerubavel’s Lumping and Splitting

Our ability to perceive things as “similar” or “different” is as much a function of mental perception as it is of social construction. In considering the socio-cognitive dimensions of how we organize concepts within our minds, Zerubavel (1996) connects the way we mentally group things with the ways in which we perceive and organize things in the physical world. Things that are similar are “lumped” together in our minds and grouped into “a single mental cluster” (421). Conversely, “splitting” means seeing things as being different or “widening the perceived gaps between them” (424). Lumping and splitting not only suggest similarity and difference but also imply something about both the physical and mental spatial relationships that are formed when organizing concepts. Zerubavel (1996) further points out that, “as we lump . . . things together in our minds, we allow their perceived similarity to outweigh any differences among them” (422). Further, he goes on to explain that when we see these groups of things we have lumped or split as being distinct or different from one another, “it is because we have been socialized to ‘see’ them” (426–27).

The process of lumping and splitting, then, is not the result of a recognition of innate sameness or difference to be found within the things themselves but, rather, a reflection of ideas about sameness and difference that we have been socialized to see. Therefore, who is doing the lumping and splitting (and why) is as relevant as what is being lumped or split. In the case of LAMs, the socialization that shapes lumping and splitting emerges from both inside the professions, through practice and preparatory education, as well as through outside forces that include policy makers, government agencies, grant-making institutions, and researchers. The next section of this article will consider in more detail who is responsible for the lumping and splitting happening around LAMs to piece together the narratives that emerge around lumping and splitting LAMs.

The Story of Lumping and Splitting the Lams

LAMs are often lumped in response to a perceived need for increased cross-institutional collaboration, which often leads to discussions of convergence. In 2008, the OCLC published a paper for LAM practitioners entitled “Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration among Libraries, Archives and Museums” (Zorich, Waibel, and Erway 2008). This report explores the intra-institutional collaborations of LAMs existing within a single organization. It highlights the
transformational aspects of collaboration, conceptualizing it on a continuum of contact, cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and convergence (11). In addition, it discusses catalysts for collaboration that include terms such as vision, mandate, incentives, and trust. While this work remains valuable in spreading a sort of gospel of collaboration by example, it is used in this article to highlight some of the main points in the story of the lumping of LAMs.

As has been noted, who is doing the lumping is important. Zorich, Waibel, and Erway’s (2008) paper encouraging collaboration between LAMs was produced by what could be considered an outsider—namely, the research arm of a library vendor organization—OCLC Research. OCLC Research’s (2013) mission is “to expand knowledge that advances OCLC’s public purposes of furthering access to the world’s information and reducing library costs.” The fact that these kinds of collaborative projects also support the organization’s mission puts in perspective the idealistic nature of the report, giving it a championing tone that often runs through other articles, such as those written by Lorcan Dempsey (2000), Christian Dupont (2007), and Paul Marty (2010), though many other examples can be found. This connection between mission and collaboration highlights two of the key drivers of collaboration: universal access (through digitization) and finance/budget issues, which will be discussed later in this story. It should be noted that the Zorich, Waibel, and Erway’s (2008) report is mentioned here not to imply that it is not worthwhile but, rather, to establish it as a document with a particular kind of agenda—to introduce ideas around collaboration for LAMs in an attractive light that also serves its own organizational ends. Such ends are linked to broader policy trends influencing LAM outsiders, which will in turn impact LAM insiders. These insiders are practitioners who represent the ultimate focus of the vision, mandates, incentives, and trust that Zorich, Waibel, and Erway (2008) identify as catalysts for collaboration. Practitioners are often those charged with enacting collaborations and/or orchestrating convergence.

This illustrates another problem in the story of lumping LAMs—how collaboration and convergence are often linked as if the latter is the natural outgrowth of the former. In the context of the continuum proposed by Zorich, Waibel, and Erway (2008), convergence is pictured as the inevitable next step after collaboration, although these authors explicitly link convergence to technical systems. However, explicit differentiation between collaboration and convergence is not always made. It was common throughout much of the literature to see collaboration and convergence being used either somewhat interchangeably (see, for example, Allen 2002; Dupont 2007; Duff et al. 2013). This is potentially problematic because each term implies a different end: collaboration means people working together, while convergence implies a physical or theoretical coming together. This lack of intentionality in term usage may be having undue influence over discussions about the nature and feasibility of collaboration and convergence because each outcome potentially has very different implications for LAM practitioners and their institutions.
From the lumping and splitting perspective, we must question how mental perceptions of LAMs are being shaped not just by the practices of LAM insiders and outsiders but also by the wider societal influences encouraging digitization and universal access. A good place to begin is by considering how the development of practice has led to the current trifurcated state of the world of LAMs—in other words, by considering what the social construction of practice in LAMs has looked like.

**Origins of LAM Practice**

Although LAMs are today perceived as being different, the work of Zerubavel (1996) suggests that this kind of split is not only the result of innate differences between these institutions but, instead, reflects the socio-cultural climate in which these institutions have developed. The LAM collaboration literature often references historical examples in support of a unified approach to LAM practice, such as the Mouseion at Alexandria (Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt 2008). Others have linked the role of collections to the formation of knowledge commons that have helped pave the way for the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution (Hedstrom and King n.d.). Lisa Given and Lianne McTavish (2010) argue that lumping LAMs represents a trend toward reconvergence—that is to say, a return to tradition as opposed to a new development. Given and McTavish (2010, 8) not only note the tendency of elite patrons to group these institutions together, joined in their roles of educating the underclass and in providing cities with “visible signs of civilization,” but they also describe how two Canadian institutions began as object-collecting institutions (consisting of specimens and artifacts) because the order of the day called for teaching by carefully looking at exemplary objects, which at the time was considered a more valuable way of learning than “merely” reading. Over time, books and sometimes archival documents were added to these collections to complement learning through looking, creating what would be seen today as a kind of hybrid institution (ibid.). Eventually, the popularity of these hybrid institutions declined as books were foregrounded as the preferred educational materials (ibid.). This shift was also reflected in new institutions being built, such as the Carnegie libraries, whose spaces generally privileged books and excluded objects (ibid.). These developments paralleled professional developments in library and information science, such as the development of the American Library Association (ibid.).

Given and McTavish (2010) illuminate several important points related to the idea of convergence and LAMs. This idea does not represent a new phenomenon but rather provides historical precedent for encouraging collaboration as well as convergence between LAMs, an idea supported by the other historical examples found in Thomas Kirchhoff, Werner Schweibenz, and Jörn Sieglerschmidt (2008) and Margaret Hedstrom and John Leslie King (n.d.). This implies that we should reconsider the trend of lumping LAMs as being solely driven by technological determinism, budget limitations, or the whims of LAM insiders and outsiders. Given and McTavish’s (2010) work exemplifies the
connection between societal factors and practice, as they link the privileging of books, to shifts in educational methods and to increased literacy rates in the early twentieth century. This combination of factors influenced the professionalization of librarians. Though this example is library-centric, it seems safe to assume that the educational preparation of curators and archivists has developed similarly in response to developments in the wider societal realm. This suggests that the influx of “new” possibilities around digitization and access requires the reconsideration of practice in the context of each field’s developmental history. As it did in the early twentieth century, LAM education now finds itself at a point where it must change in response to developments around communication, technology, and information, and this will be the topic of the next section.

The Role of Practice in Maintaining the Split

While history and the literature suggest that current LAM professional education needs to evolve, few LAM insiders seem particularly ready to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater in order to begin anew as one unified profession. This is true even of those who seem to be generally in favour of collaboration, such as Nancy Allen and Liz Bishoff (2001), who discuss collaboration between academic libraries and museums, and Alexandra Yarrow, Barbara Clubb, and Jennifer-Lynn Draper (2008), who discuss collaboration between public libraries, archives, and museums. Given the general institutional resistance to change, it is understandable why the uneven use of these terms might be anxiety-producing for LAM professionals. Although LAM re-convergence may not be a new idea, history can neither erase nor negate the century’s worth of practices that have developed in the meantime. This further supports the need to be purposeful and explicit in the discussion of collaboration and convergence. Where Wendy Duff et al. (2013) identify LAMs as three distinct types of institutions that share common functions of collecting, conservation, research, and public service, their less-than-careful use of the terms collaboration and convergence seems to imply that these shared common functions could be seen as a reason to merge the institutions as much as to simply work together. Many other authors would likely argue that the consideration of shared functions tells only part of the story.

Dinesh Katre (2011) provides a much-needed perspective on convergence and divergence in LAMs in India. Looking beyond the goal of integrated access, Katre (2011, 195) questions the wisdom of thinking of LAMs as “the same thing referred to by different terminologies.” Recognizing the different phases of evolution in which each of the LAM disciplines finds itself, Katre suggests a more unified approach to integrating digitization and digital preservation into the disciplines as opposed to integrating the disciplines themselves. Such an approach implies a more deliberate and realistic path toward change that might be more palatable to practitioners, one that stands in contrast to the rhetoric of outsiders that has a tendency to highlight the transformative powers of digitization.
Jennifer Trant (2009) similarly recognizes a disconnect between the call for convergence between LAMs and professional education, which omits training skills related to the digitization of collections. This leads to a gulf between LAM insiders and outsiders, which is exacerbated by policy makers, as Trant characterizes it, who tend to speak more idealistically about ensuring equitable access and preservation for all. Trant notes how policy makers draw “on the desire that all information be available to anyone, anywhere” and how “the vision of an integrated cultural web is portrayed as a powerhouse, latent with the potential of unrealized knowledge” (369). This provides yet another example of the idealism that sees only the transformative effects inherent in digitization without considering the potential drawbacks. However, this idealism has yet to catch up to the reality of LAM professionals on the ground, where institutions are challenged by diminishing budgets and a lack of training and technology required to accomplish these goals. Trant (2009) recognizes, similar to Katre (2011), how professional training and education have been slow to evolve to include the range of digital activities that are implied by collaboration and convergence, despite the strong call for convergence around digitization that has yet to become appropriately integrated into LAM practice.

Helena Robinson (2012) takes this a step further, arguing that the push for collaboration and convergence overlooks the nuances that have developed in practice, and considers how these subtle differences provide a plurality of approaches through which LAMs engage with history, meaning, and memory. Further, Robinson sees convergence as incorrectly assuming “an essential compatibility and purpose around the concept of memory and history” (414). In addition, she notes other institutions that could be included under the memory institution moniker, including schools, universities, media corporations, and government or religious bodies (ibid.). What Robinson describes are the ways in which these fields of practice have developed over time and how each provides a different approach to remembering and representing the past. In short, according to her viewpoint, a convergence that includes only LAMs may be too limited given the subjective nature of memory making, and an attempt to merge these practices might marginalize aspects of domain-specific approaches, leading to an unintentional sameness around collecting.

What can be gleaned from Katre (2011), Robinson (2012), and Trant (2009) is that, while education for LAM professionals may need to evolve in response to digitization, collaboration, and convergence, the level to which practice across the domains can or should converge will continue to be debated. As LAM institutions adapt to society’s changing needs, so too should the related professional realms. The question seems to be not only how much practices should change but also who should be leading these conversations. In any case, the role of the domain-specific approaches of museums, libraries, and archives will remain relevant for the foreseeable future precisely because of the unique aspects of the approach each takes to the practice that Robinson (2012) describes.

Nevertheless, the notion of a combined professional curriculum for LAM practitioners is not new, although it often seems unlikely. Fernanda Ribeiro
(2007, 116) suggests a new “historical, custodial and technical paradigm” for LAM education based on curriculum harmonization efforts that were developed by the UN Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in 1974 and which were revisited again in 1987. Currently, we are certainly no closer to a fully integrated curriculum across these fields. Ribeiro suggests that the combined curriculum may have difficulty finding traction because it originates within the field of information science. This link to information science, which branches off from library and information science, may be seen as privileging libraries over archives and museums (ibid.). In addition to the problem of domain hegemony, this slow response to change in LAM professional education is tied to the politics of inertia inherent in academia. While a discussion of professional education in the academy is outside the scope of this article, it is worth stressing that academic departments are often steeped in their own sorts of tradition (and politics). Therefore, it remains to be seen how educational programs will respond to changing needs and times. However, it should be noted that the research for this article revealed at least one program now designed to train “memory institution professionals” at the PhD level, Memornet in Finland (Sormunen 2012).

So far, a picture is emerging of LAM professionals who are trained in relatively separate traditions within programs at educational institutions that are slow to embrace change. As a result, the three practice communities remain separate. However, this should not imply that LAM practitioners as a whole are opposed to collaboration. Collaboration often takes place between LAM institutions within the same organization (Zorich, Waibel, and Erway 2008), between academic libraries and museums (Allen and Bishoff 2001), and between public libraries, archives, and museums (Yarrow, Clubb, and Draper 2008). Some practice areas that have been suggested as points for collaboration include: how these institutions describe and manage their collections (Hjerppe 1994); in the consideration of the kinds of objects they collect (Rayward 1998); and in their decision of what to collect (Pymm 2006). Where Roland Hjerppe (1994) focuses mainly on metadata and description as the areas around which LAMs could come together, W. Boyd Rayward (1998) provides an in-depth look at the problems of electronic documents beyond the typical focus on standardization of metadata. He sees the distinction between LAMs as relating to the kinds of objects each institution collects, suggesting that there is much crossover between the object types in collections at all of the institutions and that these areas of overlap could act as starting points for collaboration (ibid.).

Bob Pymm (2006, 61), too, is highly supportive of the need for the “blurring of the divide” between LAMs. He considers the problematic and subjective nature of significance, meaning the process by which institutions decide what they will collect and preserve and how this might change as LAMs start to collaborate and converge. This thread is picked up in some ways in Jan Pieterse (2005) but from a museum practitioner’s perspective. Here, it is important to understand that there is as much support for lumping LAMs as there are reasons to maintain the traditional split. In general, it could be said that most practitioners can read “the writing on the wall” that digitization, and the related talk
of collaboration and convergence, will likely continue to be the “the next big thing” for the foreseeable future. Practitioners, as has been discussed, seem aware of the problems they will encounter as collaboration and/or convergence continue to be incorporated into institutional goals.

This section has discussed how LAMs have historically developed communities of practice around their collections in relation to the role of museums, archives, and libraries in responding to changing societal needs. These differences in practice are usually recognized by outsiders as a minor hurdle to be gotten over to achieve access for all through digitization. However, “getting over” these hurdles is more likely to be recognized as a challenge by practitioners as opposed to those outside the profession. For instance, Susan Allen (2002, section II, para. 3) notes additional “barriers to custom” beyond professional education and preparation that include legal issues such as fair use, privacy, and European Union (EU) public lending rights, which will also prove challenging to collections as they enter the digital realm. Allen implies that such legal issues, at least, are complex societal issues that will stand as challenges to the idealistic end of access to digital collections for all. In many ways, continued large-scale digitization has the potential to create more problems than it solves. Nevertheless, because LAMs exist within the developing information society, these institutions are not immune to the talk of convergence that seems to be pervading all forms of media (Hjørland 2013; Jenkins 2006). The next section discusses in more depth the role of policy championing access for all that seems to be leading the charge for digitization of LAM collections that can lead to collaboration if not convergence.

Information Society = Digitization = Lumping LAMs

Information society policy that encourages universal access and access for all through digitization seems to be a main driver of collaboration and convergence between the LAMs (Dempsey 2000; Hjørland 2000; Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt 2008; Trant 2009; Varniene-Janssen 2010; Robinson 2012). A review of just three articles that discuss projects in the EU, for example, mentions close to a dozen EU information society and related cultural policies (see Dempsey 2000; Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt 2008; Varnienė-Janssen 2010). In addition to suggesting the vastness of the policy landscape, the rhetoric that surfaces around these projects further emphasizes, as mentioned previously, the kinds of romantic and transformational notions (seeped in technological determinism) that policy makers ascribe to digitization. In addition, national digital projects throughout the EU also emphasize the goal of preserving national and local identities within an increasingly globalizing world (Varnienė-Janssen 2010; Manžuch 2011).

In Germany, one goal of digitization is the creation of a single point of access (as opposed to a merged multi-institutional database) to digital materials at branch cultural institutions of mainly national-level archives, museums, and libraries throughout the country (Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt 2008). Regina Varnienė-Janssen (2010) talks about similar national-level projects
in Lithuania, noting that the mission of digitization includes both the preservation of cultural heritage objects as well as preservation of the information about these objects, such as metadata, digital captures, and related digital information. She identifies various project outcomes, including increased (digital) access to collection objects; the extended lifetime of objects (that is, originals will be handled less after digitization); improved information about objects (more current and more authoritative); the promotion of Lithuanian culture in a globalized world; and economic feasibility and increased efficiency (since converged digital projects are thought to save time and money). While it is unclear to what extent the authors of the articles about projects in Germany and Lithuania are LAM insiders or outsiders, it is clear that these reports on digital projects have a particular agenda to present their projects in a positive light, echoing the information noted previously in Zorich, Waibel, and Erway (2008). The projects sound interesting and inspiring, but I would argue articles such as these lack critical discussion because they do not present or discuss in detail the more challenging project aspects. Therefore, it remains unclear to what extent these projects are measurably producing the outcomes that they claim.

The notion of inspiring rhetoric brings to mind Wayne Wiegand’s (1999) library faith. Library faith essentially describes the unchecked assumption that libraries have nothing but good and pure motives, which leaves them seemingly immune to a critical eye in the research literature, which leads in turn to “tunnel vision and blind spots” or to a lack of critical analysis in the field (Wiegand 1999). In the case of digitization and universal access, information society policy seems to be extending this library faith by combining it with technological determinism. The proliferation of rhetoric-filled literature suggests that transformational policy goals have become internalized and naturalized by grant-making institutions, which in turn leads to the funding of projects that push the information society agenda. This approach seems to create a carrot/stick model of collaboration for LAMs to follow, at times forcing collaborations that may or may not have come about more organically. In general, LAMs, like all non-profit institutions, face tightening budgets and are in need of grant funds to make ends meet. Out of necessity, they craft their grant proposals to meet the new requirements, in essence, privileging collaborative projects and creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. The results of these grants, then, stand as evidence for the (usually positive) outcomes of grant-funded collaborative projects (without recognizing that grant funding for other kinds of projects may be minimal or non-existent). However, this is not meant to imply that outside factors of policy makers and grant makers are solely to “blame” for this trend of lumping LAMs, as the role of technology in this trend toward lumping can also be observed in the field of information science, which is the focus of the next section.

The Role of Information Science
While it would be easy “blame” the lumping of LAMs solely on external factors related to policy, funding, and digitization, the problem of lumping LAMs also
includes information science researchers, who are considered outsiders here based on the generally accepted split that separates research from practice. The problems inherent in lumping LAMs can also be linked to the move from library and information science to information science (Given and McTavish 2010). In fact, one finds relatively early references in the library and information science / information science literature to all three institutions together (see, for example, Buckland 1991; Hjerppe 1994; Hjørland 2000) as well as continuations of these early “lumping”-related discussions in later works (for example, Buckland 2012; Hjørland 2013). It is worth noting that these early references predate widespread use of the Internet.

In his discussion of information as a thing, Michael Buckland (1991, 353) refers at one point to “archives, libraries, and offices”; at another point, to “archives, data bases, libraries, museums, and office files” (357); and, later, to talks of how “a museum, an archive, a library of printed books, an online bibliographic database, and a corporate management information system of numeric data can all validly be regarded as species of information retrieval system” (359). This shows how LAMs can be lumped both as forms of information as well as information systems. In 1994, Hjerppe (1994, 173) uses the term memory institution for the first time to include “libraries, archives, museums, heritage (monuments and sites) institutions, and aquaria and arboreta, zoological and botanical gardens.” He uses the term “document” to “encompass all types of objects collected by the memory institutions of society” (173), which, similarly to Michael Buckland (1991), stresses the formal properties of the information they collect. Hjerppe (1994) sees the differences between LAMs as embodied in their institutional cataloguing practices and suggests that the outreach and preservation functions of LAMs are similar enough that their eventual convergence into similar information management systems is likely. Hjerppe’s suggestion of merged information systems for LAMs not only reflects a sense of technological determinism, but it also reflects a narrower conceptualization of information management systems that stands in contrast to the universal-access-for-all role championed in current information society policy.

A few years later, Hjørland (2000) explored the problem of labelling in library, documentation, and information fields and suggested the term memory institution as one that is generic enough to be used to describe the central object of study in library and information science. Hjørland foregrounds LAMs in their role as cultural institutions as a way to overcome the theoretical roadblocks arising in information science at the time and recognizes that memory institutions can be digital as well as physical, but he notes the technological expertise required to manage such systems, suggesting a new aspect of practice. As with Buckland (1991) and Hjerppe (1994), Hjørland (2000) also casts the net wide to include within the umbrella of “memory institution” the idea of science, science documents, languages, scientific communication, and electronic databases. Hjørland also recognizes that it is the “division of labour” (36) between different kinds of institutions that separates them, but he notes that this division will change by necessity in the digital environment. What we see in Hjørland,
then, is the recognition that practice in LAMs will need to change in response to digital systems, but because this is coming from a researcher’s perspective in information science, it is unclear to what extent his ideas would have reached LAM practitioners more generally.

This trend of lumping LAMs has been developing within information science, and it continues alongside the recognition of the “sameness” of what LAMs do: collect, preserve, and exhibit objects embodying various forms of knowledge (Bates 2010). Marcia Bates (2010) justifies her controversial decision to include an entry on museum studies in the third edition of the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* based on the shared goal of museums and libraries of knowledge preservation. She also notes how museum involvement in digitization activities, as well as the formation of joint government-granting agencies such as the Institute for Museum and Library Services, influenced her decision (ibid.). And though Buckland (1991) later reconsiders his notions around the idea of information as a thing, he frames his argument around the role of archives, libraries, and museums (along with online information services and related organizations) as “information-providing services” (Buckland 2012, 1). In the end, Buckland (2012) concludes that a term such as “information-providing institutions” is too simplistic a characterization of what these organizations do precisely because of the role these institutions play within the wider society. However, as with Bates (2010), we can see that in information science the idea has taken hold that LAMs may be more similar than they are different. This recognition has led to several terms being used to describe LAMs as a group. The next section considers the problems raised by the terminology used to refer to LAMs in the aggregate, to link the work of information science researchers to that of LAM practitioners.

### Referring to LAMs in the Aggregate

The literature reviewed for this analysis applied a variety of collective descriptors when referring to LAMs together (and, it should be noted, multiple descriptors were often employed within the same article). These included:

- libraries, archives, and museums (in any order);
- collecting institutions;
- cultural heritage institutions;
- cultural institutions;
- information institutions;
- information-providing services;
- memory institutions; and
- repositories of public knowledge.

A paradox of sorts emerges when one recognizes that these collective terms describe the aspects of practice around which the LAMs are generally split, but here these aspects of practice function as a unifying force. For example, LAMs are all collecting institutions. However, what they collect and their processes of selection are different (Rayward 1998; Pymm 2006). Each institution provides
information, but the points of interpretation differ—information is left to the user in the library or archive, while the museum interprets its information objects in the form of exhibitions (Robinson 2012). This emphasizes how the essence of practice is essentially found in the details (ibid.). It also suggests that future research may want to focus less on sameness and difference in LAM practice and more on the role these processes will play in forming the kinds of institutions LAMs want to become. Further, as Buckland (1991), Hjerppe (1994), and Hjørland (2000) show, LAMs can also be lumped with institutions beyond LAMs.

Gaps in the Story

While the debate will certainly continue as to whether lumping LAMs is beneficial or detrimental (though it does not need to be an either/or proposition), it is important to consider how some additional unseen forces are shaping this story. First, a main driver of collaboration/convergence seems to be information society policy, which is encouraging an agenda of universal access for all, which has impacts at both the national and local levels. In EU countries, for example, such policy tends to encourage the development of digital cultural heritage resources that preserve local identities in the context of national-level projects (Kirchhoff, Schweibenz, and Sieglerschmidt 2008; Varnienė-Janssen 2010). This activity foregrounds the role of LAM professionals as intermediaries between collections and user communities as LAM processes of selection extend to the realm of digitization (Pymm 2006). As LAMs can neither collect everything nor digitize everything, selection for digitization carries with it the same baggage as it does in the development of physical collections. The fact that the “universality” of digital collections will be shaped by the same imperfect processes as physical collections is often overshadowed by the emphasis on the transformational potential of digitization to provide universal access for all. It needs to be recognized by LAM insiders and outsiders alike that selection for digitization will influence the “universality” of universal access to collections in both positive and negative ways.

Second, the influences of policy on the LAM grant-funding sector also need to be foregrounded (Dupont 2007; Manzuch 2009; Marty 2010; Manzuch 2011) as policy tends to prioritize the kinds of projects that are and are not funded, which makes the sustainability of projects unclear. Grant funding that encourages LAM collaboration exists now because digitization and access for all are a current policy focus, but what will happen as funders move on to “the next big thing”? Often, initial funding by grant-making agencies is seen as seed money provided with the assumption that projects should eventually become self-sustaining (with the implication that this will happen easily if the project is worthwhile). However, it is not clear how the costly and time-consuming process of digitization, which makes things freely available online, will transform into additional revenue. Given that LAM funding acts as a mandate for projects (Given and McTavish 2010), one wonders what the collaborative model for funding projects will be as the availability of soft money shifts to new projects.
Third, users of LAM-created digital collections are not well understood. User impact evaluation represents a complex, expensive, and time-consuming undertaking for LAMs (Williams et al. 2005). Not only is evaluation difficult for practitioners to accomplish because of budget and time constraints, but LAM professionals often do not have the expertise to appropriately interpret their findings when evaluations are undertaken (ibid.). Thus, it seems likely that conclusions of outsider funders and policy makers about the need for increased digital access to collections may be based on limited evidential understanding of user behaviour and information needs in the context of LAMs and digital collections. Further, as Allen (2002) points out, “[n]obody knows you’re a dog (or library, or museum, or archive) on the Internet,” a notion that reinforces the idea that the distinctions between LAMs seem to be most relevant to those who work in these institutions (Rayward 1998; Allen 2002; Usherwood, Wilson, and Bryson 2005). Bob Usherwood, Kerry Wilson, and Jared Bryson (2005, 96) found “little recognition amongst the general public of a ‘commonality of purpose’ between museums, libraries and archives.” While users generally see LAMs as trusted providers of information, people generally use the most convenient information resources (ibid.). The finding that users tend not to care where online information comes from (Rayward 1998; Allen 2002) suggests a disconnect between LAM value and use. The general public considers LAMs to be essential and sees them as valuable and worth funding, but this perception does not necessarily correlate with the use of these institutions (Usherwood, Wilson, and Bryson 2005). While the argument for increased digitization and access for all leads to the hope that collections will be more widely available and (by extension) more widely used, it remains to be seen how online access and use will be evaluated and quantified and to what extent this information (or lack of it) will impact future LAM funding.

Finally, these disconnects between policy, funders, users, and sources of information leads to an important final point about technology’s role as a mediator of access to digital collections. The role of algorithms in the culture of increased digital connectivity should also be questioned, as José van Dijck (2011) demonstrates in his study of Flickr Commons. Van Dijck highlights how interactions with digital information often assume a neutrality of technology that is anything but, as Internet searching employs algorithms and other protocols that exist to serve site owners as much as users. The reality is that digital interactions are often under the influence of a sort of “technical unconscious,” which has the potential to shape and control interactions in ways that are invisible to users. Attila Marton (2011) similarly considers the role of networks and algorithms but in the context of memory and forgetting in the digital realm. Marton argues that information is forgotten when it is transformed into data, which questions what it means to digitize collections, transforming physical objects into bits and bytes. Rather than acting as a greater form of memory, he suggests that the digitization of cultural objects may encourage a forgetting of these objects once primary access is in digital form. These two examples remind us that digitization with the goal of universal access for all is transformational, but not always for
the better. It adds a host of considerations that technological determinism has a
tendency to gloss over.

Conclusions and Ways Forward
In investigating the trend of “lumping” LAMs together, this article reveals a
story that begins with a call for collaboration and convergence between LAMs.
This call responds to a push to digitize collections to provide universal access for
all. Often, this trend toward lumping is influenced by outsiders, such as policy
makers, grant funders, and information science researchers, who seem to have
their own ideas about how and why LAMs should come together. Lumping
LAMs reflects a history of their development as hybrid institutions that later
became split around practice. Separate professional traditions emerged in response
to changing societal needs in which LAM institutions (and professionals) con-
tinued to grow and develop. Splitting LAMs seems to be most prevalent in
the minds of LAM professionals, though this has not impeded collaborative
activities. Currently, it seems that LAMs are lumped or split based on the work
of practitioners, whose activities are used as arguments both for and against
collaboration and convergence. Arguably most relevant to this story is the
rhetorical influence of policy makers and funders as they strive to achieve the
idealistic goal of universal access for all. While the current story of LAMs is of
a convergence driven by idealism, it often lacks a critical assessment of the role
of technology and assumes user needs as opposed to relying on evidence-based
impact studies. For now, the effects and outcomes of the current trend toward
lumping LAMs remains to be seen.

However, this story is ongoing and will continue through additional inves-
tigation on the part of practitioners as well as researchers. What is clear is that
the cognitive process of lumping and splitting LAMs does not reflect inherent
differences between these institutions but, instead, sheds light on the changes
happening in wider society that require the re-evaluation and perhaps integra-
tion of LAM conceptualizations both by LAM insiders and outsiders. What
could arguably be more revealing is to consider a variety of future research ques-
tions. For instance, to what extent are LAMs collaborating or converging? What
will happen as these institutions that have been separate continue, more and
more, to come together? Where will the changes in professional education
originate: with LAM practitioners or within the educational programs them-
selves? And how will these changes affect practitioners as well as institutions?
Finally, will continued lumping lead these three distinct institutional types
to lose their distinctiveness? More importantly, of this entire discussion, what
matters exactly in the twenty-first century digital age?

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