CoLIS as 'community of practice': A study of papers presented at Conceptions of Library and Information Science conferences, 1991-2022

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Abstract

Introduction. This paper examines CoLIS proceedings since its inception, addressing two questions: 1) has CoLIS achieved its goal of convening a *critical mass* of library and information science (LIS) scholars to articulate and demarcate the field's *sphere of reality?*; and 2) has CoLIS developed a *community of practice* for scholars exploring the *general conception of the discipline*, as it was designed to do? (Vakkari, 1992).

Method. The paper examined 362 short and full papers published in the 1991-2022 CoLIS proceedings. Published prefaces, keynote addresses, and calls for submissions informed the analytic framework.

Analysis. Analyses included authorship trends and the nature of the papers themselves, including types of methodologies, and depths of reflection on research practices and conceptual underpinnings of the field. Papers were analysed using a community of practice framework, alongside the articulated goals for CoLIS conferences (Vakkari, 1992; Wenger, 1999).

Results. Most CoLIS papers were conceptual, qualitative, and textual by design, and report results of research studies. Only a small subset were reflective papers, articulating the conceptual underpinnings of library and information science.

Conclusion. CoLIS is an engaged community, particularly in Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, and Europe. There is potential to expand into a vibrant, global community of practice to examine conceptions of the discipline.

Introduction

Since 1991, every three years, scholars from around the world come together for the Conceptions of Library and Information Science (CoLIS) conference. The first CoLIS conference was held in Tampere, Finland, aiming to bring together a 'critical mass' of scholars to engage in 'self-reflection' to provide 'conceptual analysis of the discipline in order to outline its central articulations and basic concepts, as well as the relations between them' (Vakkari, 1992, p. 3). The conference convenors explained that meeting this goal

> requires collaboration … and some degree of coordination of the research effort. In a small discipline like ours, this in its turn requires increased opportunities for interaction between researchers interested in the same area of study. One central means is to organize international scientific conferences focusing on a specific topic. (Vakkari, 1992, p. 1)

In doing so, the conveners recognised that 'higher-level theoretical commitments are not the conscious solutions of an individual researcher … Rather, the general conception of the discipline acts as a frame which constrains the researcher's solutions' (Vakkari, 1992, p. 3). Understanding disciplinary conceptions is, therefore, at the heart of CoLIS, whereby researchers in library and information science can come together to 'articulate and demarcate the sphere of reality which is the object of our research [since that] will influence the choice of research strategies at a lower level' (Vakkari, 1992, p. 3).

In 2016, keynote speaker Louise Limberg reflected on the development of the library and information science field and on CoLIS as a vehicle for scholarly engagement that focused on the conceptual underpinnings of the field. She noted CoLIS's 'prevailing aspiration was to establish a common core, to synthesise rather than open up for various viewpoints or perspectives' (Limberg, 2017, p. 2). The papers presented in 1991 were therefore 'highly conceptual; the only empirical studies presented are overviews of library and information science research' (Limberg, 2017, p. 2). Limberg referenced Vakkari's 1991 opening speech, where he explained CoLIS was designed to 'clarify the conceptions on the object of research, on the scope and the central phenomena of library and information science from three perspectives; social institutionalisation, cognitive institutionalisation and the nature of the discipline' (Limberg, 2017, p. 2). Limberg considered the 2016 CoLIS program to be representative of the diversification and breadth of library and information science research and theoretical approaches.

As the CoLIS conference has evolved and adapted to the changing landscape of library and information science (LIS) research, this paper considers whether (and/or how) CoLIS has achieved the goals Vakkari (1992, p.3) articulated, over time, using community of practice (CoP) theory as a framework for analysis. The concept of convening a 'critical mass' of scholars to examine the 'general conception of the discipline' and its 'sphere of reality' (Vakkari 1992, p.3) mirrors Wenger's (1999) characterisation of what constitutes a community of practice. This paper, therefore, examines the papers presented at CoLIS since its inception, to address two key questions: 1) Has CoLIS met its goal of bringing a *critical mass* of LIS scholars together to articulate and demarcate the conceptual underpinnings of the field? 2) Has CoLIS developed a *community of practice* for LIS scholars interested in exploring the *general conception of the discipline*?

Background

It is often difficult to pinpoint the exact moments when new academic specialisations emerge, let alone to document the influence of in-person meetings on their establishment. One could argue, for example, that publishing a landmark work, or launching a new journal, demonstrates significant

commitment to a new specialisation. Among information behaviour scholars, for example, Dervin and Nilan's (1986) paper is often cited as the point at which library and information science embraced studies of information seeking, information needs, and information use (see Given et al., 2023). Similarly, the creation of the Information Seeking in Context (ISIC) conference in 1996 gave the information behaviour community a regular meeting place, which continues to this day. The value of scientific conferences is sometimes debated in the context of environmental impacts, accessibility, and inclusions of marginalised groups, and the effects of the global pandemic on in-person conferences continue. However, research demonstrates that conferences generate academic value. Hansen and Pederson (2018), for example, argue that conferences are 'an important vehicle for academic and societal value creation' (p. 358) and conclude that conferences 'maximize the uptake and circulation of research findings as well as promote knowledge-sharing and agenda-setting with potential impact on the academic community and society at large' (p. 358).

A brief history of the CoLIS conferences

For library and information science scholars concerned with the conceptual underpinnings of the field, the creation of CoLIS filled a significant gap. While many conferences offer opportunities to share research results (e.g., the annual meeting of the Association for Information Science and Technology, which celebrates its 88th year in 2025), there are very few opportunities to share meta-level, conceptual explorations of research practice in the discipline. The launch of CoLIS provided a distinctive home for these discussions, across all specialisations. In 1999, the proceedings describe the conferences as being

> unique in a sense that they are not organized by a professional or scientific organiza-tion, with which the field abounds, nor by a national or international institution with interest in library or information science. People from various universities with interest in the field organize them as a cooperative international venture in order to reflect. (Aparac et al., 1999, p. XI)

This idea, of creating a *cooperative* of scholars to *reflect* on how the field was conceptualised, was ideally timed and remains sorely needed. For decades, for example, library and information science researchers have been concerned with how theory is used. Twenty-five years ago, Birger Hjørland (2000) noted 'it is a well-known fact that LIS lacks good theories' (p. 517-18); he cited examples from the 1980s and 1990s showing 'a lot of papers are published and much practical work is done without explicating any theoretical or metatheoretical assumptions' (p. 518). It was within this landscape that CoLIS found its place, arguing that by understanding library and information science's 'sphere of reality' one could then identify 'what are held as central areas of research [and] what problems are seen as significant and fruitful [for the field]' (Vakkari, 1992, p. 3).

For more than forty years, CoLIS has thrived. In 1996, the proceedings describe the outcome of these scholarly reflections as leading to

> the strong emergence of an improved integration of and balance between the long-standing technology-driven traditions and the human-centered approaches to the scientific exploration of information (Ingwersen & Pors, 1996, p. 1).

In 1999, the aim of CoLIS was reaffirmed, with the conference aiming to 'critically explore and analyze library and information science as a discipline and as a field of research from historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives' (Saracevic, 1999, p. XI). In 2002, the conveners reiterated the 'ongoing need for discourse about the character and definitions of key concepts' in the field (Fidel, 2002).

A shift in CoLIS's focus and intention

Yet, there is a point where the focus of CoLIS began to change. In 2005, the conference welcomed research from computer science for the first time, alongside library and information science. It broadened its focus and took a decidedly interdisciplinary position:

> CoLIS examines the historical, theoretical, empirical and technical issues relating to our understanding and use of information, promoting an interdisciplinary approach to research. CoLIS seeks to provide a broad platform for the examination of context as it relates to our theoretical, empirical and technical development of information-centered disciplines. (Crestani, 2005, p. VI).

CoLIS 2007 expanded, further, to become a 'broad forum for the exploration and exchange of ideas,' while also examining research trends and developments in the field, including theories and methodologies (Byström, Nordlie, and Pharo, 2007, p. 1). It gave scholars the opportunity to 'discuss, extend or take to task the major theories and assumptions in the LIS field,' but also included an 'education forum' for the first time. In 2013, CoLIS focused on 'philosophies, social and cultural perspectives' of the field (Pálsdóttir, 2012), while 2016 and 2022 echoed 2007's positioning as 'a broad forum for the exploration and exchange of ideas' (Heinström, 2021). The 2025 call for submissions retains a focus on 'conceptions (ideas, approaches, theories and so forth)' but also describes the conference as 'a broad forum for the exploration and exchange of ideas in [library and information science] and related disciplines' that welcomes 'diverse contributions offering empirical, theoretical, and historical perspectives' (Ruthven et al., 2024).

A brief overview of communities of practice

Communities of Practice (CoP) theory was a useful framework for the study. A community of practice is a group of people with a shared enterprise or knowledge domain, who interact regularly, develop relationships, and have community norms, routines and tools (Wenger, 1998, 2000, p. 229). A key feature of a community of practice is where learning is a 'generative social practice in the lived-in world' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35). Community of practice theory has evolved from its original focus on apprenticeship and situated learning (see Lave & Wenger, 1991), to include a widely used social theory of learning applied in various professional contexts, such as business, education, and health (Tight, 2015).

A community of practice emerges to address a challenge or problem, and to provide a social learning environment and *interpretive support* for individuals and organisations to access and apply tacit knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98.) The original concept of a community of practice saw them as organic and spontaneous (Lave & Wenger, 1991), however the value of the concept in supporting organisational learning and knowledge management has seen organic communities of practice supported by management, as well as intentionally created (McDonald & Cater-Steel, 2017). Wenger (1999, p. 5) identifies how to evaluate a group's progress toward a community of practice by exploring opportunities for engagement, including social capital created through event interactions. This study examined whether CoLIS constitutes a community of practice and (if so) how this is evidenced in published papers.

The key indicators of a community of practice are:

1. A joint enterprise and understanding of community goals;
2. Mutual engagement that generates norms and relationships of mutuality or social capital;

3. A shared repertoire of resources, such as language, routines, sensibilities. (Wenger, 1999, p. 4).

A community of practice shares many characteristics with an academic discipline in that they both support formation of identity, development of social capital, and facilitation of ongoing learning and development. Community of practice theory has been applied to analyses of academic discipline communities to identify the types of relationships and practices involved (see Klein & Hirscheim, 2008; Tight, 2015). Tight's (2008) study of higher education publications, for example, compares the applicability of CoP theory to the development of the higher education discipline. His analysis of citations and of connections between authors indicates that such data provides a useful framework to analyse the emergence of new and intersecting groups within a discipline. Studies in higher education also identify the value of communities of practice in supporting learning and identity within disciplines, and for bridging institutional, geographic, and disciplinary boundaries (King & Cattlin, 2017; Lodge & Corrin, 2017).

The concepts *critical mass*, *general conception of discipline* and *sphere of reality* mirror the key indicators of a community of practice, making it a useful framework for analysis (Vakkari, 1992, p. 3). Table 1 outlines the alignment between these concepts.

CoLIS goals	Community of practice
Critical mass	Mutual engagement involves connection between individuals, richness of community, and development of social capital.
General conception of discipline	Shared repertoire involves a self-awareness within a community of the concepts, language and tools which reflect their history and perspective.
Sphere of reality	Joint enterprise represents the community's prioritisation of learning and development, addressing gaps in knowledge and being open to emergent opportunities.

Table 1. Alignment of CoLIS goals (Vakkari, 1992, p3. with Wenger's CoP indicators (1999, p.5)

Research design

The team analysed all 362 short and full papers published in the CoLIS proceedings since 1991. From 1991-2002 proceedings were published in book form; the team gathered these from university library collections, including through international interlibrary loan. Digital proceedings have been published in the journal *Information Research* since 2005, so these were retrieved for analysis. Calls for submissions were also reviewed, retrieved either from archived conference Websites or using Wayback Machine, where sites were no longer active.

We excluded from the analysis the conveners' prefaces and keynote addresses; however, these documents were reviewed to guide development of the coding scheme related to setting out the intentionality of the CoLIS conferences (as noted previously, in the background section, and as summarised in Table 1).

CoP domains	Indicators of progress towards a community of practice	Potential indicators of a community of practice in evidence at CoLIS	Data points
Joint enterprise and goals	- Opportunity to negotiate joint enquiry - Identifying gaps in knowledge collectively - Vision guiding activity - Articulation of shared purpose - Members' response to shared purpose	- Evidence of reflection on LIS conceptual and/or theoretical underpinnings - Evidence of reflection on LIS's meta-level research practices - Authors' articulation of shared purpose	- Types of papers - Methodologies
Mutual engagement	- Events and interactions - Opportunities to raise concerns - Members' knowledge of others - Agreed roles, norms, behaviour and expectations	- Evidence of events and interactions - Evidence of authors returning to events, over time - Extent of author interactions	- Author affiliation - Author recurrence - Event locations
Shared repertoire	- Accumulation of shared experiences, language, artifacts, histories, methods - Potential further interactions to explore new directions - Self-representation and reflection - Traditions, methods, standards, routines and frameworks for practice - Codification and transmission of shared repertoire	- Evidence of events and interactions - Evidence of authors returning to events, over time - Extent of author interactions	- Author affiliation - Author recurrence

Table 2. Analytic framework, combining Wenger's CoP indicators with CoLIS indicators

The analytic framework (Table 2) adapted Wenger's (1999, p.5) indicators of progress towards a community of practice (i.e., Column 2) and considered this alongside potential indicators of community of practice n evidence at CoLIS developed by the authors (i.e., Column 3). The analysis of the papers identified evidence of these indicators through available data (i.e., Column 4).

Published papers were analysed to document authorship and co-authorship trends, as well as the nature of the papers themselves. Papers were categorised as empirical studies or theoretical and conceptual papers (i.e., types of methodologies, use of theory, and reflections on research practices and/or theoretical underpinnings of the field) by reviewing abstracts, research design sections, and other sections of the papers, as needed. The following data points were recorded and coded in Excel:

1. All authors' full names and countries of affiliation.
2. Paper types, categorised as follows:
    a. Empirical studies
        i) Quantitative study (e.g., reporting results of questionnaires)
        ii) Qualitative study (e.g., reporting results of in-depth interviews)

      iii)   Textual study (e.g., reporting results of content analysis of documents)
      iv)   Mixed methods study (i.e., reporting results of studies using more than one method)
  b) Theoretical papers
      i)   Conceptual (i.e., papers presenting a specific construct, idea, methodology or theory; these are not results papers, but empirical findings may be used for illustrative purposes)
      ii)   Reflective (i.e., papers that reflect on and articulate the conceptual and/or theoretical underpinnings of library and information science; these are not results papers, but empirical findings may be used for illustrative purposes)
  c) Other (e.g., papers providing an overview of professional practices, rather than presenting research results, concepts, or reflections)

The team's first author completed the initial coding across the full dataset, with additional coding and cross-checking of categories completed by the second author, to develop inter-rater consensus.

The categories for paper types evolved through this coding process. Of these categories, the *reflective* papers were identified as those that most closely represent CoLIS's stated intention. These papers present a deep reflection and articulation of the field's conceptual and/or theoretical underpinnings, and are indicative of the *reflective mode* and *self-awareness* required of a community of practice for CoLIS scholars (Wenger, 1999, p. 5).

Findings and discussion

Between 1991 and 2022, eleven CoLIS conferences were held, starting in Tampere, Finland. Over the years, most conferences were hosted in the Nordic countries (Tampere, 1991; Copenhagen, 1996 and 2013; Boras, 2007; Uppsala, 2016; Oslo 2022), followed by the United Kingdom (UK) (Glasgow, 2005; London, 2010), Croatia (Dubrovnik, 1999), and Slovenia (Ljubljana, 2019). CoLIS has been hosted only once in North America (Seattle, United States of America (USA), 2002), and Glasgow, UK, in 2025. A total of 362 short and full papers, authored by 448 unique individuals from 35 countries were published from 1991 to 2022. On average, 33 papers were presented at each conference, ranging from a low of 16 (in 1991) to a high of 53 (in 2013).

Methodological trends and conceptions of library and information science

Of the seven types of papers published in 362 papers at CoLIS (see Figure 1), the top three methodological approaches were conceptual (106, 29.3%), qualitative (80, 22.1%), and textual (64, 17.7%). However, the majority of papers presented at CoLIS conferences report results of research
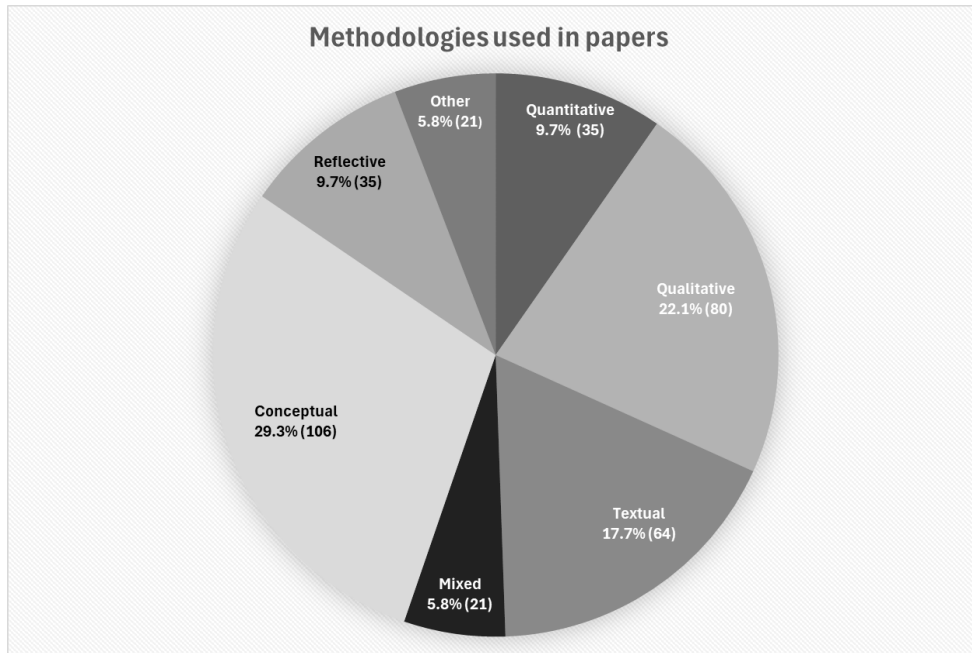
Figure 1. Types of methodologies used in CoLIS papers, 1991-2022

studies (200, 55.2%), using quantitative, qualitative, textual, or mixed methods designs. While conceptual papers on specific constructs, ideas, methodologies or theories are the most common type, these lack the reflection articulated by Vakkari (1992) and other conference convenors.

Indeed, only a small fraction of all CoLIS papers, the *reflective papers* (35, 9.7%), articulate the conceptual underpinnings of library and information science as a discipline. Yet these papers constitute Wenger's (1998, 1999) concept of a 'joint enterprise and goals' for a community of practice, as per Vakkari's (1992) stated intention for CoLIS. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the number of reflective papers has remained low
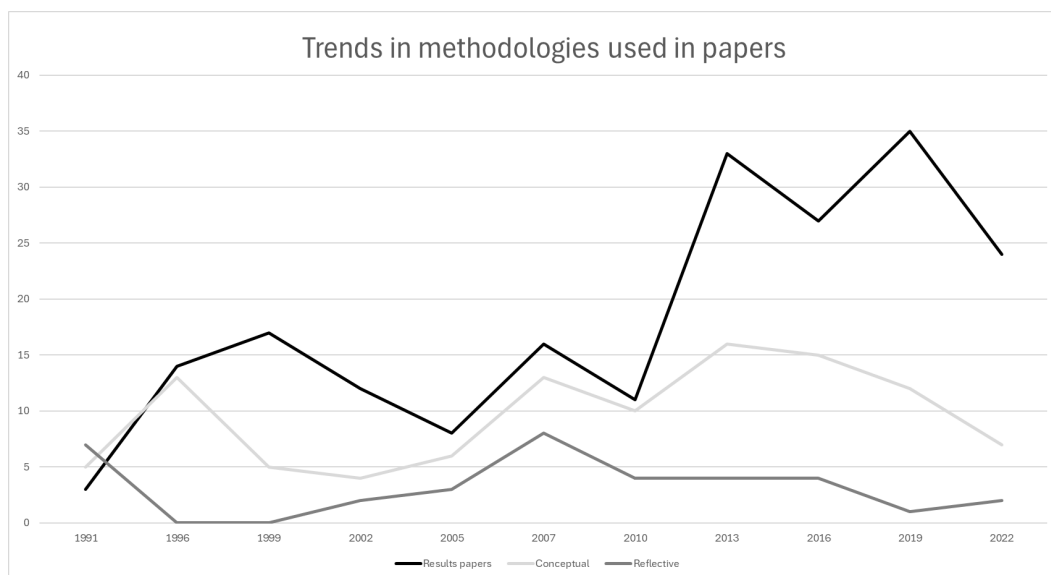

Figure 2. Trends in methodologies used in CoLIS papers, 1991-2022. The *results papers* category combines qualitative, quantitative, mixed method, and textual analysis papers.

(a peak of eight papers in 2007), and static, over time. The *conceptual papers*, despite being the most common methodology used, are also static and remain few in number overall (peaking at sixteen papers at one conference, in 2013). There were more CoLIS papers reporting research *results* than other types of papers from 1996 onwards, despite these being the smallest number (only three) in 1991. This upward trend continued until 2010. However, in 2013 the number of results papers spiked dramatically, reaching an all-time high of 35 in 2019.

Of the 35 reflective papers (by 59 authors), the largest number (15, 42.9%) were presented at two conferences, in 1991 (7 papers) and 2007 (8 papers). Reflective papers are those taking a high-level view of the discipline, considering historical developments in library and information science by examining the scholarly literature, models, frameworks, methodologies, and research contexts. They examine library and information science's core approaches, often questioning long-held assumptions or definitions that shape research practice.

The reflective papers demonstrate four groupings. First, several papers examine *theoretical frameworks and theory from other fields* and their applications in library and information science. Early examples include Ellis' (1991) look at paradigms and proto-paradigms, Hjørland's (2002) discussion of foundational theories and principles of library services, and Tuominen et al.'s (2002) development of a social constructionist metatheory. Pilerot et al. (2017) examined practice theory, while Greenshields and Given (2022) explored feminist approaches.

The second category of papers are those reflecting on *a core construct or element of* library and information science *research*. Backlund (2005) examined life worlds and meaning, for example, while Nolin (2007) and Talja and Hartel (2007) explored the user-centred *turn* in the field. Kari (2010) discussed how information is conceptualised, and Budd and Anstaett (2013) explored alternatives to framing information as an artefact. Addison and Meyers (2013) explored forty years of contestation of the term information literacy, Oliver (2017) examined the records perspective in library and information science, and Lundh et al. (2022) provided insights on critical studies of reading.

The third category of papers is those exploring *metatheories and methodologies* that inform library and information science research practice. Examples include Vamanu's (2013) paper on hermeneutics, Wang's (2016) discussion of cultural-historical activity theory and domain analysis, and Griffin's (2017) paper on ethnography. These are different styles to the method-style papers grouped under the category of *conceptual papers* in our analysis; the *reflective papers* provide a richer, deeper discussion of the implications of metatheories and methodologies for the library and information science discipline, as a whole.

Finally, the fourth category of reflective papers examines library and information science *as a discipline, including its boundaries and shifting identity*. At the first CoLIS, Smith (1992) examined interdisciplinarity in information science, Capurro (1992) explored the discipline's purpose, and Hoel (1991) used hermeneutics to view library and information science as a historical, humanistic science. Benoit (2007) used critical theory to critique the discipline's legitimacy, Bates (2007) looked at historic definitions of library and information science, and Robinson and Karamuftuoglu (2010) reflected on the nature of information science.

Overall, CoLIS's reflective papers meet Vakkari's (1992) desire to articulate and demarcate the *sphere of reality* shaping library and information science. However, they are few in number and have become increasingly overshadowed by reports of research results, particularly in the last decade.

Authorship trends and developing a community of practice

As CoLIS was designed to give space for reflective work, a key question is whether and how the conferences foster a community of practice for such reflections. There were 634 named authors on all papers between 1991-2022. However, as some authors are named on many papers, the total of unique individuals publishing is 448. Data on authors attending conferences is not available.
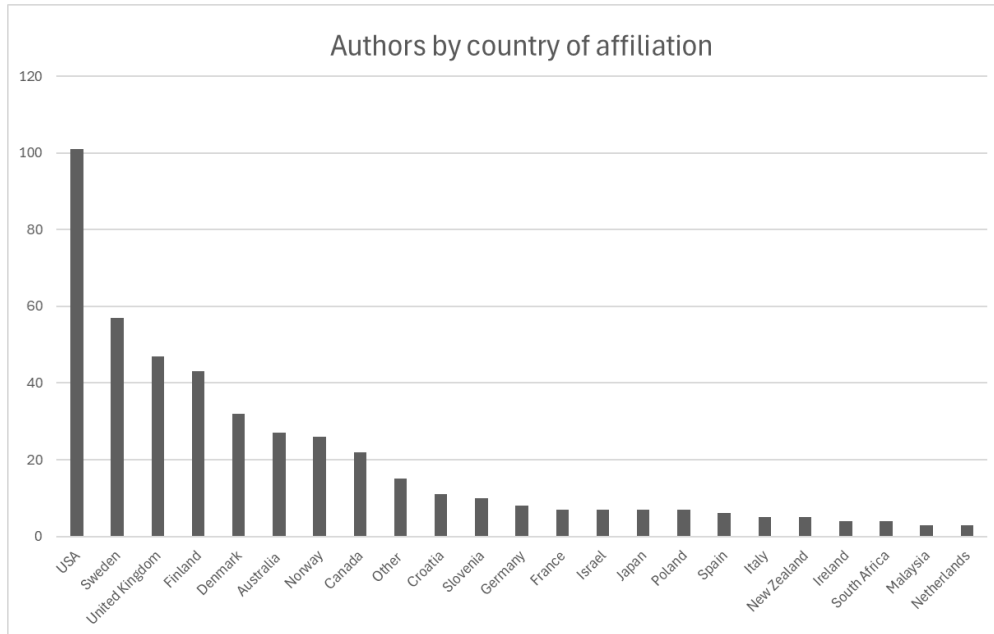

Figure 3. Countries represented by individual authors, 1991-2022; 'other' combines eleven countries with one or two authors (e.g., Iran, Turkey, Nigeria).

Figure 3 shows individuals' country affiliations; however, as seven individuals published with different affiliations over time, we calculated each affiliation for them as separate authors (i.e., a total of 457 authors with unique country affiliations). Of these 457 authors, the USA (101, 22.1 %) appears most often. The next largest affiliations were Sweden (57, 12.5 %), UK (47, 10.3%), Finland (43, 9.4%), Denmark (32, 7%), Australia (27, 5.9%), and Norway (26, 5.7%). Yet, of these 457 authors, the vast majority (350, 77.1%) were named only once, with 25% (87) of these authors from the USA.

However, as conference attendance requires funding and time for travel, it is worthwhile considering regional affiliation as a marker of engagement. Some authors may also have been PhD students who only attended once, when the conference was in close proximity to their study location. Figure 4 shows author affiliations by region, with individuals from Nordic countries (i.e., 160 people from Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Iceland), representing the largest group. This is not surprising given six of eleven CoLIS conferences were hosted in the region.
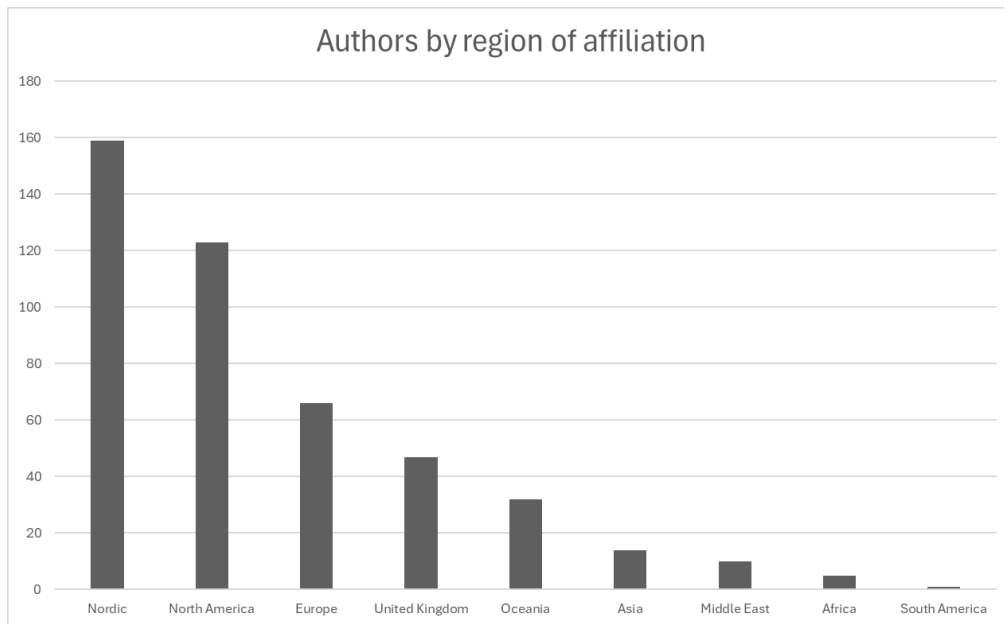
Figure 4. Regions for individual authors of CoLIS papers, 1991-2022: ***Nordic*** (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden); ***North America*** (Canada, USA); ***Europe*** (Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain); ***United Kingdom*** (England, Scotland); ***Oceania*** (Australia, New Zealand); ***Asia & South Asia*** (China, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore); ***Middle East*** (Iran, Israel, Turkey, United Arab Emirates); ***Africa*** (Nigeria, South Africa); ***South America*** (Uruguay)

The significant influence of the Nordic countries on CoLIS conference programming, and to the development of a possible community of practice, can also be seen in the number of authors with multiple papers. Table 2 presents the ten most prolific authors at CoLIS, who published five or more papers. Jeppe Nicolaisen (Denmark) is the most commonly named author, with seven CoLIS papers, including four as first author.

Name	Country of Affiliation	# of papers	# of papers, 1st author
Jeppe Nicolaisen*	Denmark	7	4
Annemaree Lloyd*	Australia/Sweden/UK	7	2
Isto Huvila	Finland/Sweden	6	4
Katriina Byström	Norway/Sweden/Finland	6	3
Kalervo Järvelin*	Finland	6	1
Birger Hjørland*	Denmark	5	5
Jenna Hartel*	Canada	5	4
Trine Schreiber	Denmark	5	4
Pia Borlund	Denmark/Norway	5	1
Masanori Koizumi	Japan	5	0

Table 2. Most commonly named authors on CoLIS papers, 1991-2022.
(the asterisks denote authors who published at least one *reflective paper* at CoLIS)

This snapshot of CoLIS's most prolific authors reflects several trends. First, the authors' affiliations mirror those of CoLIS conference locations, primarily in Nordic countries. Only two commonly named authors (Hartel and Koizumi) are affiliated with countries (Canada and Japan) that have never hosted CoLIS. A third author (Lloyd) is affiliated over time with countries that both have (Sweden, UK) and have not (Australia) hosted CoLIS.

Second, given the critical role of reflection and self-awareness in a community of practice, it is notable that five of the ten most prolific authors (Nicolaisen, Lloyd, Järvelin, Hjørland, Hartel) have published at least one reflective paper. Given that fifty-nine individuals produced reflective papers at CoLIS, including five prolific authors, there is potential here to call this a vibrant, *critical mass* of scholars, in keeping with Vakkari's (1992) vision. These 5fifty-nine people contribute to Wenger's (1998, 1999) expectations of a *shared repertoire* among a community of practice, including *mutual engagement* by presenting their work at CoLIS conferences.

As four of the five non-Nordic host countries were in the UK and Europe (i.e., in close proximity to the Nordic region), adding affiliations from these areas (i.e., UK, forty-seven and Europe, sixty-six) to the Nordic total shows significant *critical mass*. In total, 272 authors (59.5%) have come from these three regions since CoLIS's inception. As travel between Nordic, UK, and European countries is relatively quick and inexpensive (e.g., compared to traveling from Asia or Oceania), CoLIS locations have reinforced regional community involvement. Interestingly, while the number of North American authors is also high (at 123 in total), the Seattle-based CoLIS conference attracted only five American authors. That year, out of thirty-five authors, the majority (sixteen) were affiliated with Nordic countries.

Thus, the tri-regional (Nordic, UK, Europe) *critical mass* of authors clearly constitutes a robust community of practice for CoLIS, even when the content extends beyond Vakkari's (1992) original

reflective vision. Yet, the lack of repeated engagement by so many authors (i.e., 78%, or 350 of 448 individuals), including those from countries outside the tri-region, dilutes CoLIS's ability to develop a truly global community of practice that can reflect on disciplinary trends in library and information science, at scale. This also limits the ability of scholars to create robust, satellite communities of practice in other regions, enabling connections with colleagues closer to home. This could be particularly beneficial for early-career researchers who are starting to build academic networks, as well as for those unable to travel overseas. Enhancing CoLIS's ability to foster Wenger's (1998, 1999) concepts of *mutual engagement* on a *shared repertoire* arising from Vakkari's original *joint enterprise* (*i.e.*, to *articulate and demarcate* library and information science's *spheres of reality*), would enable the conferences to drive deeper, more diverse reflections on critical research issues.

Conclusion

Overall, the proceedings papers demonstrate that despite a very clear call for CoLIS submissions to address the conceptual underpinnings of library and information science from 1991 and through the initial years following, the focus of the conference has shifted significantly over time. In total, less than 10% of papers provide the deeper *self-reflection* Vakkari (1992) had planned, with more than 55% of papers presenting results of specific projects. This shift reduces the capacity for CoLIS to provide a conceptual home for scholars who wish to *articulate and demarcate* the field's *spheres of reality*, although the conference certainly remains open to these types of investigations.

The broader question of whether CoLIS therefore constitutes a community of practice is challenging to address, given the small number of reflective papers. There is certainly a *critical mass* of scholars presenting their work at CoLIS, particularly from the Nordic countries, the UK, and Europe (at 59.5%). However, it is unclear why 78% of all authors have only contributed once. That said, the fifty-nine individual authors producing reflective papers include five of the conferences' ten most prolific authors, demonstrates great potential for an ongoing community of practice for reflective work. Thus, the extent to which CoLIS has created a *critical mass* of scholars is worthy of further investigation, particularly concerning co-authorship, collaborative relationships, and citation patterns.

However, given the time and expense of international travel, the tri-regional focus (i.e., Nordic, UK, Europe) for conference venues does limit the voices that contribute to that community. Library and information science scholars are increasingly traveling to conferences again, with attendance rebounding after years of COVID-19 restrictions. However, budget pressures, caring responsibilities, and an increasing awareness of the climate implications of travel are significant concerns for academics, globally. And these raise equity issues, given that some of these concerns affect women and academics from the global south, for example, disproportionately. Library and information science authors must make difficult decisions about where to travel, how often, and how far.

CoLIS's increasing focus, then, on the presentation of research results is a double-edged sword. Presenting results papers can create new opportunities for scholars to share their work and build their networks, in an increasingly competitive landscape, and where travel funding is often linked to paper acceptances. However, the loss of a clearly defined focus on the conceptual underpinnings of the field could disincentivise engagement in the longer term, particularly for those outside the Nordic, UK, and European regions. With numerous other conferences in the discipline, including several that meet annually, it may become more difficult for CoLIS to attract authors. CoLIS's reliance on volunteer organisers, and budgetary challenges for host institutions, are also a concern compared to conferences funded and supported by membership-based associations. At a time when library and information science research issues are becoming

increasingly global (e.g., the rise of artificial intelligence tools; increasing risks of misinformation), scholars need to internationalise their networks. CoLIS presents an excellent base on which to drive this type of international community of practice concerning broader, conceptual issues.

One strategy for CoLIS to enhance its stated goal would be to encourage diversity in conference locations, including through satellite events that could meet more regularly. These could even be held in conjunction with other conferences in the field, as pre- or post-conference events, to maintain CoLIS community connections. To constitute a robust community of practice, CoLIS needs to provide opportunities for ongoing, deep reflections on the discipline's key issues; for a conference that meets every three years, maintaining connections outside of its core tri-regional footprint may become increasingly difficult. Satellite activities, particularly in other countries, and with some hosted online, could bridge the gap between events, while also combatting budgetary and climate-related concerns. This would create a robust and engaged global community of practice that could push the field's research forward.

Of course, there is also additional work to be done to fully document the value of CoLIS conferences in developing a community of practice. Network analyses to track the influence of authors over time, both to document bibliometric reach and to identify whether CoLIS has fostered new collaborations, would extend our analysis. For example, one marker of success for a CoLIS community of practice could be identification of teams that now collaborate on research projects or co-publish in other library and information science venues. The analysis presented here was also limited by the lack of available data on conference attendees. There are certainly many ways to contribute to a community of practice, over time, beyond authoring papers, including volunteering to peer review, organise conferences, and to engage with other attendees; however, new data would be needed to document these experiences. New qualitative research that explores interactions within the CoLIS community between conferences, as well as participants' immediate experiences during program development and on-site at the conference itself, would extend this study in valuable ways.

Another critical point to note is the lack of an ongoing archive of CoLIS materials. While recent proceedings are published in *Information Research*, earlier book formats have not been digitised and are difficult to locate internationally. While the team was able to track older calls for submissions using Wayback Machine or elsewhere online, the fragility of this approach for documenting CoLIS's journey is troubling. Developing an ongoing repository of materials, including recordings of panels and alternative events, would go a long way to support CoLIS achieve its goals, and to foster ongoing community engagement in the discipline.

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