History of the Library Association (LA), circa 1970s

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How do you do interpretative historical sociology of a profession? This is an exercise in British history which may make a contribution to the sociological understanding of professionalization.

How do you come up with a topic?

• Read other works in library history. Only one thorough history on the LA exists but it ends in the 1970s
• Ask what problems did the LA face and what has been unasked or unanswered by historians
• Ask what general sociological questions can be addressed in this study. Read in the sociology of professionalization

Where do you get information?

• Read other works in library history
• Archives of the LA in London
• Any works about the American Library Association which indicate similarities or differences for comparative purposes
• Works on what is going on in general UK culture and politics in the 1970s that might provide a framework for the interpretation

Combine ideas to form an initial set of interpretative questions incorporating sociological concepts

All professions must solve certain problems; differentiating themselves from non-professions, moving curriculum into university systems, carving out a set of practices for themselves alone, forming professional bodies. Initial differentiation from amateurs and clerks, developing a curriculum, and setting up criteria for entrance were the problems of the LA from the late 1800s to the 1970s. Reinvention, redefinition, and differentiation from emerging technology-driven fields were the challenges in the 1970s. This was a pivotal moment. It was not seized immediately. Why not? Was it done later?

Write, then revisit archives, revisit interpretation and rewrite