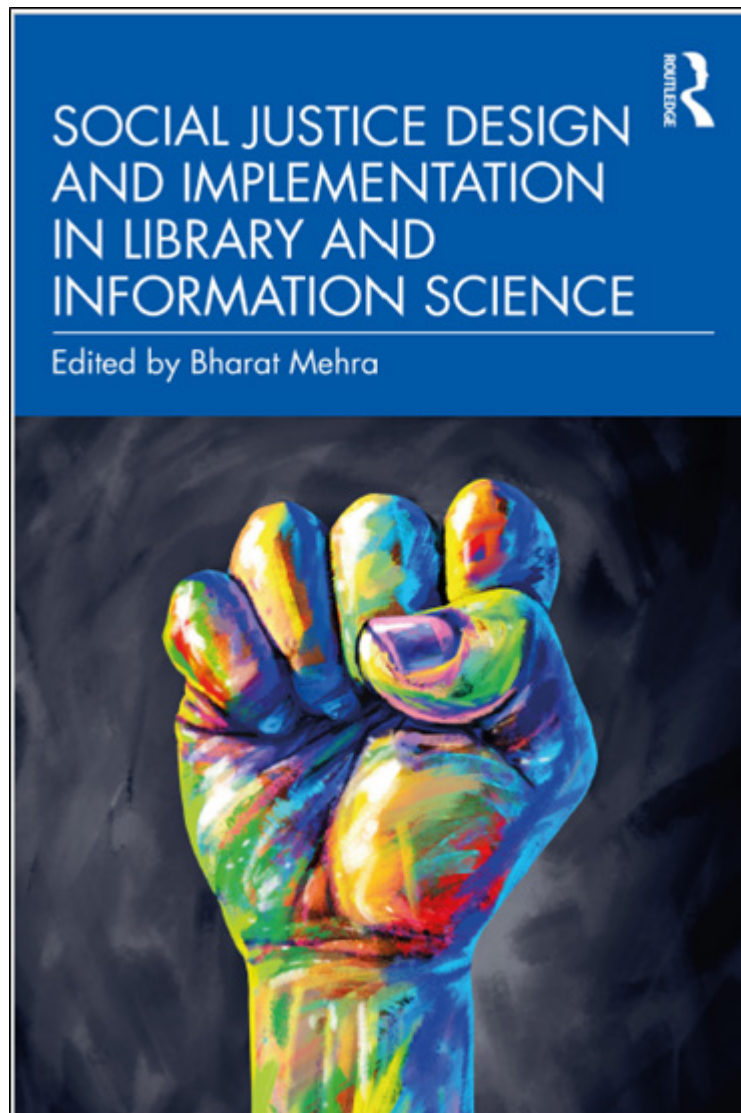


# Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science



**Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science. Edited by Bharat Mehra. Routledge, 2022, ISBN: 9780367653828, 299 pages.**

In recent years, the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession has reached a significant crossroads, as it must address long-standing systemic inequities while remaining responsive to shifting community needs. *Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science*, edited by Bharat Mehra, is a compelling and timely response to the

challenge. The Routledge book was published in 2022. The book comprises 18 diverse yet compelling chapters that explore the methods by which social justice can be effectively introduced in the practice, research, education, and policy-making of LIS. More than a conceptual treatise, the book presents social justice as an explicit and strategic process of design, encouraging professionals in LIS to adopt justice-driven outcomes in their everyday, practical work.

The book is organised into five thematic sections: Emerging New Responsibilities, Reflective Case Practices, Reaching Out: New Research Approaches and Strategies and Transforming LIS education, Instruments of Action and Change. The clear



DOI: 10.5530/jcitation.20250197

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and concise structure enables readers to navigate a diverse range of environments, including academic libraries, public libraries, archives, museums, and web-based settings. The chapters all include scenarios based on real-life situations that are outcome-focused, community-based, equity-oriented, inclusion-oriented, and empowerment-oriented.

In his introduction, Bharat Mehra starts in an impassioned, urgent appeal for a “wake-up” to ethical responsibility on the part of LIS professionals in the face of rising social injustice. His remarks underscore the long-standing association of the profession with neutrality and suggest that this identification is no longer acceptable. Neutrality, according to Mehra, often works to maintain the status quo and is detrimental to the LIS profession's ability to effect positive change. As he says, “It is no longer acceptable for LIS professionals to posit a neutral stance to community dynamics and remain passive bystanders to the unfolding of social, cultural, political, and economic realities” (p. 4).

Among the book's strengths is an association with applicable case studies. For instance, in Chapter 1, Nicole A. Cooke and colleagues reflect on how libraries responded to inequities revealed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, their chapter demonstrates how libraries, particularly those in underprivileged communities, served as hubs for communicating about health, accessing information and communication technologies, and providing relief services during times of disaster. Again, in Chapter 4, Noah Lenstra and Rebecca Floyd document the response of a regional rural North Carolina library to issues in food justice as an aspect of community engagement. Here, we can ascertain libraries' potential as change agents when their services are intentionally aligned with community needs.

Another effective chapter is Chapter 7, where LaVerne Gray and Yiran Duan apply a Black feminist epistemology to study activist mothers' information practices in Chicago public housing. Their extension of the “Black Feminist Information Community” model provides both theory and practice for community-centred LIS professionals, most notably those in historically marginalised groups. The chapter is typical of the book's broader focus on placing marginalised people in the foreground and questioning prevailing knowledge hierarchies.

The book is also critical of LIS education. Chapter 11, “The Mis-Education of the Librarian,” discusses how non-Western and non-white knowledge systems are often marginalised in LIS education, an act that the authors identify as “epistemicide.” The authors are in favour of reframing LIS education to encompass different types of knowledge and prepare future professionals for practising in diverse and fluctuating social environments.

Similarly, in Chapter 12, Clayton A. Copeland and Kim M. Thompson advocate for inclusive course development, considering the needs of students with disabilities, in support of universal design as a facet of social justice in education.

The steady emphasis throughout the book is on planning for justice, not in response to or against injustice. Social justice is framed as a factor that must be intentionally infused into service models, the curriculum, and an institution's culture, rather than as an afterthought or moral imperative. The chapters provide frameworks for building partnerships, developing inclusive policies, and measuring community impact, all valuable components in transitioning the conversation from theory to practice.

Mehra's (The editor) open discussion handling of the editorial process also deserves note. Rare but exemplary, the editor shows comments made by peer reviewers in the preface. This not only aligns with the ideals of transparency and recognition espoused by the book but also facilitates scholarly discourse and accountability.

Despite its much strength, the book has its shortcomings. The editor himself laments that most of the case studies are from North America, and there are few submissions from outside North America. While the book presents invigorating global exemplars, such as a co-design project with Aboriginal Australians (Chapter 9), a broader representation in the volume on LIS practices in the Global South would have further globalised the volume's outlook. Nevertheless, Mehra elaborates that librarians and information professionals in these regions are hesitant or restricted in asserting their work within the paradigm of “social justice” due to political, socio-cultural, or organisational inhibitions.

The other small lacuna is the lack of a concluding synthesis chapter that brings together the broad themes, models, and lessons learned. Such a chapter would have served to condense the insights into a unifying framework for professionals and educators wishing to implement the book's concepts in an organised manner.

Lastly, *Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science* is a transformative book that reimagines the future role of the LIS professional in society. The book not only offers a critique but also a guide for designing inclusive, equitable, and community-responsive services. The book will be handy for scholars, educators, practitioners, and students in the profession of LIS committed to making a difference in their field. The book is a clarion call for all of us to escape neutrality, embrace accountability, and co-create a more informed and just society through libraries.

**Reviewed by**

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**Cite this article:** Paul S. Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science. Journal of Data Science, Informetrics, and Citation Studies. 2025;4(2):281-3.