

Conference Report: Information Infrastructure of Social Science Research in India (IISSRI-2023), Salt Lake City, Kolkata, India, March 2023

An international conference on the Information Infrastructure of Social Science Research in India (IISSRI-2023) was organized by the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK) in collaboration with the Indian Council for Social Science Research – Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-ERC) on 2-3 March 2023 in Salt Lake, Kolkata, India. The challenges and opportunities related to the information infrastructure in India were explored at this offline conference. Eminent academics, scholars, and information professionals from India and abroad participated in this conference.

The conference began with a speech by the convenor, Sanjoy Kar, followed by a welcome address by Professor Achin Chakraborty, Director of IDSK. The keynote address was delivered by renowned economist and historian Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Emeritus Professor of IDSK and Adjunct Professor, Monash University, Australia. Comprising 13 sessions, including 5 plenary sessions, 4 technical sessions, and 4 parallel sessions the conference attempted to cover a diverse range of topics, and issues concerning information infrastructure in the country for research and development. Total 37 papers were presented by scholars coming from around the country and from outside. One of the highlights of the conference was the panel discussion on "Issues in Scholarly Communication". However, the primary goal of this conference was to create a platform for researchers, practitioners, information professionals, and other stakeholders to present, educate, and guide for scientific knowledge and skills.

The *first plenary session* featured three special lectures on diverse issues. Dr. J. Dennis Rajakumar spoke about 'Data Curation: Issues and Challenges.' He highlighted the need for instant access to information and how it has become possible with the advancement of ICT. He discussed the challenges of accessing administrative data collected in India dating back to the colonial era, emphasizing the value addition that data curation brings to the research process. Professor Saibal Kar delivered a lecture on 'Economic Policies and the Role of Information.' He stressed the importance of stable, predictable, and effective economic policies

and highlighted the impact of economic policy uncertainty on economic growth. He emphasized the need for academic institutions and research to work closely with information repositories to reduce people's perceptions of uncertainties in economic policies. Professor ARD Prasad spoke on 'Smart Cities, Big Data and Public Libraries,' discussing the challenges of collecting and analyzing data for effective city planning. He highlighted the supporting role of library and information science experts in data management and emphasized the need for the library and information community to sharpen their tools and techniques to handle research data management and government data management. The session shed light on various challenges and opportunities in the world of data curation, economic policy, and city planning.

The *Plenary Session-II* included two special lectures. Professor Achin Chakraborty delivered the first lecture on "Tacit and Codified Knowledge in the Time of Rapid Technological Development". In his lecture, Professor Chakraborty discussed the concept of tacit knowledge, which refers to knowledge that cannot be easily codified or put into words. He argued that with the increasing digitization of information and knowledge resources, there is a need to reflect on the distinction between tacit and codified knowledge that philosophers of knowledge have given us. He presented a brief review of the discussions that have emerged since Michael Polanyi's seminal contribution to the idea of tacit knowledge and discussed their relevance in the current context, where more and more importance is given to formalization and codification of knowledge. He questioned whether our orientation towards digital resources has led to a poor understanding of the tacit dimension of knowledge.

Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi delivered a keynote address on "Digitization and Digital Divide in Education and Society." He discussed the benefits and drawbacks of digitization, highlighting its potential for producing and acquiring e-books, saving paper, and reaching students at a long distance. However, he also noted the potential for misuse by governments and private corporations, citing examples like the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the use of Pegasus spyware. Bagchi discussed the digital divide between developed and developing countries and within India, emphasizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students who did not have access to smartphones or computers and became dropouts. Bagchi emphasized the need to address the



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digital divide and the learning divide to reduce poverty levels and improve literacy rates.

During the *third Plenary Session*, two special lectures were given. *The first lecture* was presented by Professor Sabuj K. Chaudhuri from the University of Calcutta, who discussed the "Impact of Large Language Models on Information Ecosystem". He emphasized the need for a transdisciplinary approach to explore the potential benefits and risks associated with large language models. The lecture highlighted the benefits of the models, such as democratizing access to information and enhancing the accuracy and reliability of information. However, it also raised concerns about potential risks, such as the creation of fake or misleading content and perpetuating biases. The lecture advocated for a collaborative approach to identify solutions that promote the public interest. *The second lecture*, presented by Dorothea Stricker from Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany, discussed "Research data repositories and data quality assurance in India." She highlighted the importance of research data repositories in maintaining data quality and identified barriers to quality assurance in India. The lecture suggested possible solutions to improve the quality of research data repositories in India, despite low expenditure on research and development.

The *Plenary Session-IV* of the conference focused on research data and featured three special lectures. Dr. Subrata Mukherjee and Monalisha Chakraborty from IDSK discussed the importance of preserving primary survey data in a consistent and accessible manner for future use by researchers, policy makers, and administrators. They emphasized the need for universities to address the lack of qualifications, training, and skills among present-day library workers in curation and preservation of research data. Sanjoy Kar and Dr. Saswata Ghosh from IDSK highlighted the importance of sharing and reusing data in social science research, introducing the global registry, Re3data. They also discussed the growth and development of social science data repositories in India, highlighting the need for a national-level registry or directory of repositories. Dr. Mary K Shenk from Pennsylvania State University discussed the significance of qualitative methods in social science research to understand complex phenomena, and social interactions that cannot be easily measured. She also emphasized the careful management and archiving of qualitative data to ensure that it is preserved and accessible for future research. This involves organizing, storing, documenting, and preserving data in a secure and accessible manner.

The *Plenary Session-V* of the conference featured two special lectures that touched upon important topics related to library and information services, and social science research infrastructure in India. *The first lecture* was delivered by Professor Parthasarathi Mukhopadhyay (University of Kalyani) on "Next Generation Library Applications: From Data Carpentry to Machine Learning". He discussed the potential of open-source

software, open data, open standards, and an open framework in the field of library services. The speaker emphasized the need for interoperability in integrating various open-source elements of a library system and explored the use of data science tools, strategies for handling data, and the deployment of a machine learning framework for cataloguing resources accurately. The lecture highlighted the importance of open source, open data, and open standards in making innovative library applications possible, encouraging libraries to collaborate and build on each other's work. *The second lecture* was delivered on review of social science research infrastructure in India by Professor Durga Sankar Rath (Vidyasagar University) and Sanjoy Kar (IDSK). The lecture focused on the state of social science research infrastructure in India. The speakers highlighted the growth of social science research in India but pointed out the challenges that need to be addressed, such as inadequate funding, specialized facilities, and support services for social scientists. They suggested that the government needs to invest more in research infrastructure for social sciences, including funding for research projects, specialized facilities, and support services like training and mentoring. Establishing a self-sustaining research ecosystem for social sciences in India can contribute to the country's social and economic development and help address societal issues such as poverty, inequality, and education.

The conference concluded with a panel discussion on "Issues in Scholarly Communication". The panel discussion was started by Dr. Jiban K Pal, ISI Kolkata with a short introduction to the issues. The discussion was moderated by Professor Achin Chakraborty (Director of IDSK), and featured panelists from India and the United States, including ARD Prasad, Mary K Shenk, Parthasarathi Mukhopadhyay, Saswata Ghosh, Narayan Chandra Ghosh, and Durga Sankar Rath. The panel discussed various issues related to scholarly communication, including IPR, biased laws, the monopolization of the publishing industry, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). They explored alternative publishing models, such as Open Access, and the impact of AI on scientific writing. Publishers not paying authors for their contributions or charging high prices for access to their own articles were identified as exploitative practices. The panel also examined predatory journals, data fabrications, retracted papers, and other types of scientific misconduct. The discussion sparked conversations on the serious issues facing the academic community today. You can watch the full discussion here: <https://youtu.be/yIAQWAUKknw>

The conference provided an excellent opportunity for researchers, academics and practitioners to exchange ideas and knowledge on social science research infrastructure and related topics. The plenary, technical and parallel sessions on Day 1 and Day 2 covered a diverse range of themes, offering new insights and approaches to data management, knowledge democratization, digital libraries, and sustainable research ecosystem. The participants discussed the challenges of digitization, data quality

assurance, and the digital divide in education and society. The conference also explored the opportunities and challenges of interdisciplinary research in the age of big data. The technical sessions provided an opportunity for researchers to present their

research and engage in discussions with other scholars. If you missed the conference, you can watch the full lectures and access conference materials here: <https://idsk.edu.in/conference-iissri-2023/>.

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