

Aktuelle Probleme

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Tarquiniā, Tuscania et Viterbe, qui restera certainement dans la mémoire de chacun des participants. Ce n'est pas l'un des moindres avantages de ces congrès que de permettre des contacts personnels avec des collègues étrangers. L'ABI peut être félicitée sans réserve de son accueil.

L'année prochaine, la FIAB tiendra ses assises à Helsinki.

J.-P. Clavel

AKTUELLE PROBLEME

Es liegt zweifellos im Interesse unserer Vereinigung, wenn wir hier einen Auszug aus der Ansprache veröffentlichen, welche der Präsident der IFLA zur Eröffnung der Ratssitzung am 14. September 1964 in Rom gehalten hat. Wir danken Herrn Frank Francis, Direktor des British Museum in London, für die freundliche Druckerlaubnis. Die Redaktion

Particular emphasis may be laid on two aspects of library work which are much in mind at the present time and where there is the greatest possible need for the collation of experience and for understanding and for agreement among librarians about which course should be adopted and, even more important, what course of action is possible. I refer in the first place to automation in relation to library work. There is already in existence a good body of experience about the use of machines and their capacity for storing and recovering information. We are still, however, largely ignorant about their application to the work of a library. It is probably true to say that machines can be made to do almost anything we are likely to want of them. The main trouble is that we librarians have never yet made up our minds what exactly it is we want them to do and what library procedures can be adapted, and in what way, to 20th century machine procedures. The whole position has in a way been complicated and obscured by uninformed demands and suggestions and by hasty action. It has to be realised in the first place that the requirements of different kinds of libraries are different and that while the use of computer-type machines and of information-retrieval systems may already have been possible in certain cases, it does not by any means follow that what has been done is universally applicable.

Let me make myself rather clearer. I am convinced that large libraries can only satisfy the full range of service required of them by committing as many of their routine procedures as possible to machines. I have manytimes maintained that size, unless it is carefully organised, can be a great obstacle to the full use of a library's books and periodicals and that our large libraries, of which there are very many, need to take steps to overcome this danger. In my view it is essential for such libraries to examine the possibilities of decentralisation if the needs of users are to be satisfied and if the academically qualified members of

library staffs are to bring the full range of their qualities into the service of the library. Now decentralisation makes demands for specialised catalogues which just cannot be satisfied by traditional methods: the growth of the information at our disposal and the diverse needs of library users also make it important that we should be able to present the contents of our libraries in ways by which we can satisfy users and bring information to them of which they had previously been unaware. This demand again just cannot be met by traditional methods; but it can be met by machines, if rightly programmed. I am convinced, therefore, that if we are to develop our services — as we want to do — we must call in all the mechanical aids available. But we are back again at the beginning of our dilemma: I think the machines can do their part; our weakness at the present time is that we have not decided what are the routine procedures to be programmed into the machines and how to modify our accepted practices accordingly.

I am glad to say that studies of these problems are already being undertaken by a number of large libraries: the Library of Congress, as so often, has been first in the field with its highly important publication *Automation and the Library of Congress*. News has recently reached me that Harvard University Library has instituted a study jointly with International Business Machines Corporation «to identify functions and operations in the library that may be susceptible to automation within the present state of the art or with techniques and machines that will be available within the next two or three years». The British Museum Library is also examining the problem along these same lines, as a matter of great urgency. I hope it will be possible to bring the results of these inquiries to the notice of members of IFLA, so that they may be made available to the widest possible audience and so that wide experience may be brought to bear on them. It is also most important, if our routine procedures are affected by these developments, that changes are standardised as far as possible. I often think that in matters of this kind IFLA offers the ideal context for informal, even off-the-record, discussions.

All librarians, and particularly those with the responsibility of building-up new libraries, are much troubled by the difficulty of obtaining important textbooks and works of reference. What the future holds out, it is difficult to say. But this much is certain: many of the books which are in constant use in well-established libraries will only be available to many new libraries either in the form of photocopies or reprints. This problem is by no means a new one, but it assumes ever greater dimensions and presents ever greater difficulties. It is a problem, in my view, to which librarians should give urgent consideration and I should like to see if discussed at IFLA meetings. It is true that many commercial houses throughout the world have for some time been engaged in what is called the reprint business. Normally speaking, I am quite content to leave publishing enterprises to the skill and business ability of commercial houses; this, however, is a case where something more than mere business enterprise is needed. The need for reference books and important monographs is very great. But which reference books and monographs should be tackled first? The commercial approach is bound to be partial and selective in the sense that the books likely to be reprinted first are those calculated to give the quickest and largest financial returns. It is also clear that publishing of this kind is usually undertaken on a no-risk basis; subscriptions are invited and the work undertaken only when the publisher is

assured of a profit on his investment. The result is that subscription prices are based on a minimum number of copies and hence are very high indeed. Libraries in need of these books are, as it were, held to ransom. It might be said that as librarians we have no business to meddle in such matters. But have we not a real responsibility to our fellow librarians and particularly those in charge of new libraries to see if there are any steps which we can take to help in overcoming this problem?

As a first step, I hope libraries will themselves commission reprints of their own out-of-print catalogues and monographs. If this is done a large body of important reference material can be brought back into print at modest prices. This we have already done with great success in the British Museum. If a library cannot undertake publication itself, it should at any rate see to it that the prices charged for reprints of its own works are properly controlled. It should also be possible, by consultation, to set up a non-commercial body which would make itself responsible for the publication of reprints at carefully controlled prices.

Yet, however much is done by the publication of reprints, it is abundantly clear that many libraries will be largely dependent on microcopies of important text books, of newspapers and of periodicals. But the photo-copy field is equally bedevilled by lack of planning and lack of constructive thinking. As many of us are dependent on microcopies, and all of us are users of microcopies, ought we not as librarians to take active steps to plan and co-ordinate the supply? The planning of scholarly photo-copying has recently been the subject of an investigation financed by the Council on Library Resources and carried out by the American Council of Learned Societies. The report of this investigation re-inforces what I have said about the failure of librarians to plan activities in this field. «In the past three decades» says the press-release about this Report «in the past three decades, during which photocopying (meaning primarily microcopying) has grown to be a major resource of scholars, there has been duplication of effort, hit and miss and poorly-executed projects, and very often lack of knowledge of what has and has not been copied». Here surely is a subject on which librarians might be expected to have an organised world policy and where attempts should be made to reach agreement to end this chaotic situation.

And another thing, talking of microcopies. Are *we* satisfied, are scholars, are library users satisfied with the means we are able to provide for reading microforms? Are we happy to have half-a-dozen different sizes and types of microforms rendering our reading apparatuses still more clumsy and difficult to live with? I hope that IFLA, in consultation with FID, will take up these questions urgently and energetically and attempt to find means of making microforms play the part they should in our libraries. This again is of the utmost importance if we consider the vast use that can be made of them, and indeed will have to be made throughout the world — the new as well as the old.