

RESOURCE SHARING AND COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES IN ASTRONOMICAL LIBRARIES

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The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines "resource" as 'A means of supplying some want or deficiency; a stock or reserve upon which one can draw when necessary'. The Collins English Dictionary further defines "resources" as 'a source of economic wealth especially of a country or business enterprise (capital, equipment, personnel, etc.)'.

The essential theme of this Workshop is resource sharing because it has been organized to provide an opportunity for librarians of astronomical observatories and institutions to meet to discuss common problems and ways of stimulating greater cooperation between libraries in different countries. The White House Conference on Library and Information Services held in 1979 outlined the justifications for resource sharing by stating:...'resource sharing is now mandated by the information explosion, the advance of modern technology, the rapidly escalating costs of needed resources, and the wide disparity between resources available to individuals by reason of geographic location or socio-economic position.'¹

Sewell defines "resource sharing" as a term for working out inter-institutional relationships for the benefit of users of library and information services, a field which is now frequently described as changing from a materials-centred to a user-orientated service. He lists the range and interdependence of resource sharing schemes under 2 main categories. Firstly, the exploitation of existing resources facilitated by directories of resources, the exchange of accession lists, and union lists of holdings; referral of readers; interlibrary loans; access to translations; and references to documents through indexes and abstracts. Secondly, he suggests means of improving overall resources through co-ordinated and co-operative acquisitions, joint storage projects and staff education. He stresses that the success of resource sharing projects depends on effective administration, and for this a key tool is the regular monitoring of performance in terms of quantity, quality, and the cost of services in comparison with alternative modes of provision.²

Most of these aspects will be dealt with during other sessions of this Workshop, but this panel, and the audience in general should consider the following points:

1. The effectiveness of duplicates and wants lists, and the value of acquisition lists.
2. The economics of information services are of growing concern. A point to be discussed should be the merits of reciprocal or fee-based sharing of resources.
3. An international forum should be established for the exchange of information between librarians in astronomical observatories and institutions. The P.A.M. Bulletin which is published by the Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics Division of the Special Libraries Association of America, goes some way to achieving this aim, but, I suspect is distributed mainly in the United States.

4. Consideration should be given to the creation of an International Directory of Astronomical Library Resources which will state the acquisitions and resource sharing policy of each library, list the scope of its resources and highlight its special collections.

Informal systems of cooperation are known to succeed to a degree, but if resource sharing is to be truly successful, the needs of the astronomical community must be studied, current programmes evaluated, and new ideas implemented if necessary.

REFERENCES

1. United States. White House Conference on Library and Information Services, 1979. The Final Report. Summary. – Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 1980.
2. Sewell, P.H. Resource Sharing : co-operation and co-ordination in library and information services. – London: Deutsch, 1981.