Access to Conference Proceedings: Now or Never?

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ABSTRAK

Kecuali kertas kerja yang sudah diterbitkan secara formal, untuk mendapatkan kebanyakan kertas kerja yang lain yang tidak diterbitkan, kita bergantung hampir seluruh harapan pada perasaan muhibah daripada pihak penganjur seminar. Selalu juga kita memerlukan kerjasama daripada peserta sendiri. Para peserta itu menjadi sumber pembekal yang penting kerana pihak penganjur semasa lazimnya tidak mengedarkan kertas kerja secara meluas. Ini mungkin akibat daripada kejahilan mereka tentang nilai kertas kerja itu kepada komuniti sarjana, atau mungkin mereka tidak sangat mementingkan pengedaran, pengawalan serta pengelolaan prosiding seminar.

ABSTRACT

Except for the papers published formally, the availability of most unpublished papers is almost totally dependent on the goodwill of the sponsoring organizations, and at times even on the people attending the conferences. The latter are particularly a good source of supply of papers from conferences hosted by extemporaneous organizers who as a rule do not distribute their papers widely. This may be due to their ignorance of the value of the materials to the wider scholarly community. It may also be that they attach too little importance to the dissemination, control and management of conference proceedings.

INTRODUCTION

Hardly a day passes when a colloquium, conference, congress, convention, seminar, symposium, workshop or discussion group does not take place somewhere in the world. Although it may not be prudent to use the word 'conference' and other related terms interchangibly, there is nevertheless no need to attempt to highlight the subtle distinctions and typical characteristics which differentiate one term from the other. For our purpose in this paper it is sufficient to state that a conference is any form

of academic meeting where research papers are read, regardless of levels (i.e) local, national or international), duration (one-day or more), formats and locations. Excluded from the scope of this paper are meetings of administrators, held regularly by industrial and other corporate bodies for administrative purposes. To be excluded too are the classroom seminars which are essentially a teaching device. Since the fundamental objective of all academic gatherings is the dissemination of information, the difference between the various kinds of conference is only a matter of degree. The congress, for example, is generally understood to have a large audience and discusses broad topics; whereas the colloquium deals with narrower topics and involves a much smaller body of participants (UNESCO Reports 1970: 91).

However, whatever the size and type of gatherings, the essential point we are concerned with is the documents or proceedings generated by them. Some of the papers generated are undoubtedly of a high quality, embodying the results of original research; while others may be useful in that they review current advances. Papers in the latter genre may be considered to be ephemeral, containing meterials based on preliminary findings. Like other preliminary reports published in books and journals, they may draw forth new discussions, to be updated or superseded subsequently. They are ephemeral in the sense that they are produced in limited quantities for restricted circulation, and are not subject to rigorous quality control, either in content or physical appearance (Vickers 1982: 500). These materials are sometimes labelled as grey literature (Vickers 1982; Wood 1982). Some of them are in the form of a few sheets of muzzy typescript, stapled at one corner, while others are printed off-set or mimeographed. As most of these unpublished documents are useful to a lesser or greater degree, they are worthy of being acquired and made accessible by libraries in order that interested users may benefit from them, and so expand their knowledge.

The impetus for these conferences comes by and large from the increasing inadequacy of the conventional media of communication to disseminate information and research findings quickly. Formal publication in books and journals may take several years because of the time taken by queuing and reviewing as well as other problems. Not surprisingly, therefore, the conference circuit seems to have developed mainly in response to a basic need for a better, quicker and more direct communication medium than that provided by the overloaded traditional means (King 1961: 70). Whatever the nature and purpose of the various conferences, the formal presentation of papers is usually their main event and reference point. The problem of acquisitions and accessibility of the papers emanating from the conferences is thus the focus of attention in this paper.

In terms of library operations, the problem of accessibility tends often to be associated with publication, because the more materials are published, the more likely they can be made available relatively easily. But, only a small proportion of the papers read at conferences is actually published, either individually as articles in journals or collectively in a volume of conference proceedings, a vast majority of them, therefore, remain unpublished, and access to them is extremely difficult. Generally, formally published materials are easy to acquire as they are available commercially. They are also cited, indexed and abstracted in a wide range of bibliographical services. In any case, the problem is not entirely one of identification and location of materials; it is also one of a diversity of practices among the different organizers in producing and circulating the papers. Information about the papers, however, must be gathered from various pre-conference circulars. This by no means is the end of the problem. Papers published randomly as articles in journals, for instance, also pose a challenge to the vigilant librarians, no less than to the others to locate them.

PROBLEMS OF ACQUISITIONS

The procedures involved in acquiring conference papers differ in many ways from those applied in obtaining books and serials. This is largely owing to the fact that only a small percentage of them is ever published in some form or other while most papers remain unpublished and so are deemed unobtainable through the normal book-trade channels. The problem of acquisitions is aggravated not only by the phenomenal output of papers in recent years, but also by the variety of sources from which they emanate. Papers are usually made available during the conference, although some may only come to light through distribution, sales or publication later on. These varied practices in availability and distribution can and often do cause problems to libraries, forcing them to apply different techniques to acquire the materials.

One needs to establish the sources of the documents. This inevitably involves maintaining contacts with the organizations targeted. Although there are occasionally reports and reviews of conferences published in journals subsequently, they are often too late to be of much use as an acquistion tool, unless utilized for retrospective acquisitions of published proceedings.

As a rule, acquisitions through correspondence should start shortly after the announcement is recieved. Indeed, time is of the essence in the process of acquiring conference papers. To ensure success, regular contacts need to be maintained, as it is often not just a matter of picking up the

telephone and expecting that all requests will be met instantly. Nevertheless, the lack of cooperation from conference organizers is almost always a major obstacle. Such organizers often come into being hastily on an ad hoc basis and dissolve themselves shortly after the conference is over, thus making correspondence a well nigh unavailing means of eliciting cooperation. This being so, libraries need to be vigilant and set up a 'strike force'. Local libraries need to send 'commandos' around to retrieve papers at their respective conference venues nearby. Being close to organizers and probably fully aware of the conferences held in their neighbourhood, local libraries are of course in an unique position to acquire most, if not all, of the papers without too much trouble. Their success is indispensable in helping other libraries within the same country to build up a pool of conference materials collectively at the national level. This cooperative approach can definitely relieve the other libraries of the problems of locating and acquiring the papers from distant libraries, With proper coordination, each library can concentrate on acquiring materials generated in its own local area or region. However, it is not always as easy in practice as it sounds. Libraries themselves are beset by problems such as the lack of staff, depressed staff morale, complexity in the distribution of papers and so forth. This situation inevitably limits their ability to acquire a significant amount of unpublished papers of local origin on a regular basis. In the end, they are left with the option of acquiring conference proceedings only in the published forms if available at all, through the normal book trade channels.

To meet the demand for the unpublished local conference papers, libraries often have to rely on interlibrary loans. Being so, the goal of a comprehensive and up-to-date collection of local papers cannot be achieved. Earlier on, it is mentioned that timely acquisitions of papers from source is vital. This is because usually once a conference is over, the surplus copies of papers are stacked away and forgotten, except perhaps by a handful of librarians or users who may have seen them quoted at a later date. It is indeed fortunate if we can get them from the libraries of the organizers. These libraries can be an unreliable source. In Third World countries, in particular, many of the libraries present are hardly more than rooms for reading newspapers and popular magazines. They are in no position to be of much help in this regard. Another serious obstacle encountered in local acquisitions is that the administrative staff are often reluctant to approve the purchase or loans of such materials. The excuse often given is that approval from superiors has first to be obtained.

Timely acquisitions at source is necessary for yet another reason. This is, the organizers may be without sufficient supporting staff for distribution, or might even lack an efficient inventory and filing system. They could also be financially disadvantaged. Indeed, many professional

societies once well known as fervid distributors of papers to library depositories are no longer able to do so due to short print-runs forced by spiralling costs in printing, postage, staff salaries and overhead charges. This in fact is a part of the general financial malaise now besetting many organizers. On the other hand, some libraries have found direct acquisitions at source too time-consuming and expensive and so have gradually discontinued it. However time-consuming and expensive though they may be, such special acquistion trips nevertheless do lead to the acquisitions of at least a certain amount of the otherwise unobtainable papers. These papers may be acquired as gifts, loans or as straight forward purchases.

Writing to authors is yet another useful tool of acquisitions. It could result in at least their own papers being obtained. Exchange arrangements among libraries have also been used occassionally. To make them effective, the libraries concerned need to have sufficient copies of the papers which may be of interest to other libraries. As most libraries cannot meet this basic condition, exchange arrangements involving them are generally short-lived. Personal attendance seems to be yet another favourite method used by some fortunate librarians to acquire conference papers. Even so, it is not always easy for them to collect all the papers distributed in the different sections of a conference running concurrently. Nevertheless, by going directly to the source, the libraries have a better chance of getting to grips with the problem. Besides collecting papers, they can also establish contacts with other participants - be they librarians, scholars or political figures. These contacts may occasionally provide useful tips for the acquisition of papers from other conferences.

Academics regularly attend conferences as part of their teaching and research work. In due course, they tend to collect a sizeable number of papers from attending different conferences. Unfortunately, a few of them tend to guard their collections jealously as if they are treasured personal possessions, reluctant to pass them on to the libraries even for copying. As a result, these materials are inaccessible to those who do not have the opportunity to go to the conferences. It is probably true that the hard pressed academics do not have enough time to read all the papers thoroughly during the conference itself. But, even after reading them again and again, they still prefer not to part with them so as to ensure that they can be immediately accessible to them as and when they like to. This selfish attitude not only brings into question their professional commitment to sharing ideas with others, but it probably also deprives many potential users of the only possible access they could have to privately held papers.

For various technical and financial reasons, most libraries do not acquire conference papers directly. They depend mainly on depositories and donations. Accepting what is available, they regard the ones they do

not get as unobtanable. Obviously, such acquisitions could be made easier and simpler if the libraries are designated as depositories. But there may be problems here as well. Can they be assured of receiving the materials consistently? Do the various Deposit Acts also cover unpublished materials? It is well-known that these Acts cover different categories of materials to varying degrees of competence and effectiveness in different countries. However, by relying wholly on depositories and gifts, libraries may not have as many conference papers especially of local origins, as those available in the more resourceful libraries far away, because the latter are always active in pursuing materials of interest to them, no matter whence they might be had. There are loop-holes, too, in the application of Depository laws. Even if libraries in some countries are supplied with materials pursuant to the laws, this is not necessarily uniformly done by all conference organizers. While small and ad hoc organizers may fail to supply their papers possibly due to their ignorance of the laws, the big and established organizers may argue that they cannot supply copies to depository libraries as the quantity of the papers printed is not enough even for their own audiences. On the other hand, enforcement of the law is usually not a problem in respect of organizers who are publishers themselves. The enforcement of the law may remain weak, but it can still be used to remind the organizers of their obligations. If the law is effectively enforced, the depository libraries should have very much more than what is normally available in the non-depository libraries. But, ironically, they do not. The usual reason given is that they lack staff. This means that items which do not arrive automatically at their doorstep are not pursued earnestly or can only be pursued on an ad hoc basis as time and staff allow (Pemberton 1972: 162). It is obvious that badly managed local libraries do not on the whole command the respect of the 'publishers'. Thus, it is not uncommon to find that organizers prefer to deposit their conference proceedings with nationally and internationally known (and therefore better organized) documentation centers, or libraries with documentation facilities, than their own local libraries, such as departmental libraries. When a need arises, the small libraries ironically have no alternative but to turn to overseas libraries for local papers.

Sometimes, libraries receive collections donated by eminent politicians and renowned scholars. As chairmen or speakers at various conferences, they are usually given complete sets of the papers. Over time, these tend to build up into respectable personal collections. The nuclei of these personal libraries are unpublished reports, files, conference papers and other contemporary grey literature. Believing that professionally managed libraries can provide better protection to the materials that they possess, the public-spirited collectors make a donation of them. The receiving libraries, for their part also treasure them by putting them in special rooms

and making them accessible to the general public, in keeping with the wishes of the donors.

Having discussed some common problems connected with the acquisitions of conference papers, the interested readers may wonder why most of the papers read at conferences are not published despite the tremendous improvement in photographic reproduction facilities in recent years. One obvious answer is the steep rise in the cost of printing, paper and other materials. If we examine the current state of the publishing industry, we can hardly fail to note that even the reputable publishers are forced to reject a large number of manuscripts, mainly because of financial constraints. Profit margins in publishing depend directly on the size of the market; thus the higher the level of speciality, the smaller the market and the greater the financial risks that the publishers will have to take in publishing specialized titles. Demands for books and journals by academic and research libraries, traditionally the major buyers of academic publications, has also shrunk following recurrent cuts in library budgets. The financial squeeze is particlarly felt in the demand for conference proceedings as most libraries buy conference proceedings selectively. Although the sales of conference proceedings may be enhanced by good reviews and advertisement, they cannot be promoted like popular literary works. As such, it is difficult to fully recover the investment in them, in order to ensure uninterrupted cash flows for new publications.

Fortunately, a few commercial publishers with high reputation for excellence in special subjects do publish conference proceedings. If they cannot make profit, they try to break-even by financing the loss-making publications with profits from their more saleable products. There are also some prestigious (and financially sound!) professional bodies as well as industrial or trade associations which not only sponsor conferences regularly, but also publish the proceedings on their own, by using revolving funds. Together with international organizations such as UNESCO, they play a significant role in sponsoring conferences and financing the publication of their proceedings. In this way, more conferences are held and more proceedings are able to be made available at reasonable prices.

Apart from commercial motives, many commercial publishers tend to shy away from publishing conference proceedings for other reasons. To begin with, they may find the proceedings to be a bulky product of multiauthorship and so of uneven academic quality. Some papers might be of top quality, but others would need extensive revision and updating. Secondly, papers may lack editorial refinement because of lack of rigorous quality control, either at the editing or production stage. This happens because the organizers usually print the papers as submitted without any quality control. This procedure is adopted in order to make the papers available in time for distribution to the participants. But, when it comes

to publishing them, the publishers are torn by the question of whether to publish all the papers or select only the best from them. In addition, many publishers, especially in Third World countries still lack sufficient capital and efficient marketing networks for academic publications although they may have great enthusiasm. In short, a combination of these and other factors unfortunately render an increasing number of conference papers to pass into oblivion without a trace. This is particularly the case where the organizers wind up and cease to exist after the conferences.

The weakest point common to most conferences is that there is seldom any follow-up. Many organizers regard their work as completed following the closing ceremony. The convening of the conference itself involves elaborate arrangements made in advance, such as provision of staff to cope with participant registration and other logistics. But, they do not extend these arrangements beyond that to ensure wider dissemination of proceedings. In other words, the organizers pay more attention to the mere convening of the conferences and overlook the long-term contribution they can make to the furtherance of knowledge by disseminating information through a wider distribution of conference papers. Distributing papers during conference is only a limited means of propagating knowledge contained in the papers. But, due to the financial and administrative constraints, the organizers cannot be blamed entirely for not being able to publish the papers or to distribute them more widely. The heart of the matter is that unless the organizers have a greater awareness of their responsibility in respect of spreading knowledge and information, acquisitions of unpublished conference papers will continue to remain as difficult as ever. Knowing that they are incapable of either publishing the papers or making copies of them available, some conference organizers, do allow libraries and individual readers to make copies from the originals deposited elsewhere.

In recent years, there has been a visible growth in type-written, off-set and even litho-produced conference proceedings for sales. Although this form of production may be considered as non-professional by conventional standard, it is nevertheless extremely effective in making the otherwise unobtainable materials available. In this way, many organizers have successfully become 'autonomous' publishers, printing conference papers by using their own reprographic machines, at a minimal cost; while some others, by off-setting camera-ready copies of manuscripts supplied by the authors, but exercising hardly any editorial control or refereeing. What is needed is adding only binding, index and copyright ownership. Though they appear very unprofessional, they provide a service which is fast, efficient and cheap. It is well-known that conference proceedings are also published as special issues in appropriate journals. The papers published in this way, are made avalable reasonably quickly through a

distribution system which is at least as extensive as the number of regular subscribers the journals have. The published papers can thus be picked up rapidly and widely by various bibliographical and abstracting networks. This makes for a useful tool in acquiring overseas conference proceedings retrospectively. But, here the problem is that usually only the well-known organizers and established societies will be successful in persuading the· reputable journals to collaborate with them in the venture.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CONTROL

By bibliographical control we mean the assembling and recording of information, not necessarily confined to published materials only. It is not only central to collection development, but also critical in the librarians' work of providing a whole range of readers' services. Without detailed knowledge of the existence of new materials, it would be difficult ot develop a collection. It is obvious that librarians may need to know of their existence before they can acquire them; then, in terms of bibliographical control, they need to have the materials before they can document them. In bibliographical control, the appropriate citation information in terms of author, title, name of conference, etc is needed. With the information thus made available, the readers can have direct access to the materials they want without the frustration of trying to trace the half-remembered details of individual papers that have been bound with other papers.

Bibliographical control of unpublished conference papers is grossly inadequate in many countries, because traditionally they are left out of bibliographies, indexes and abstracts. This situation is comparable with other non-book materials in terms of coverage, currency and accessibility. In a sense this is inevitable because the users' interest is usually limited to papers already published and available in certain libraries. Nevertheless, such lists of unpublished conference papers which are available and produced by individual libraries on their own initiative are useful in an attempt to promote awareness and exploitation of the literature. Apart from indicating the materials available in the libraries concerned, these lists are otherwise difficult to use. But, unless more organizers can be persuaded to deposit their materials with libraries, there is not much that libraries can do to improve bibliograhical control of conference papers. It is mainly through the cooperation between the conveners and the libraries that more papers can be controlled bibliographically and documented for easy retrieval. One of the obstacles is the organizers' insensitivity to the importance of these materials to researchers and the role that the libraries can play in promoting their use. It is not easy to impose Legal Deposit Acts on them in view of the unpublished nature of the papers. They are

considered as ephemeral or grey literature, and as such falling outside the purview of the Deposit Acts in most countries.

To meet the demand for specific papers which are bound together with other papers, it is not enough for libraries to merely acquire the volume of the proceedings available. It is necessary also to index each and every paper contained in the volume and to make efforts to publicise them. It is of course true that indexing individual papers dispersed among a large quantity of heterogeneous materials is a tedious and time-consuming business. To do it effectively and continuously, a pool of traned staff and adequate financial resources will be required. But such resources are not always available to all libraries. Hence, there are libraries which are only able to catalogue conference papers as a single bibliographical unit, using the general theme of the conference. Consequently, papers which do not deal with the general theme are unlikely to be retrieved, unless one tediously scans through the whole collection or happens to remember them. This approach of providing a broad and, paradoxically, ambiguous subject access may, however, be applicable to only certan conference papers. Similarly, the general subject catalogue compiled according to traditional method is often not very useful to readers looking for specific papers tucked away in a big volume of conference proceedings or published in special issues of journals.

The frustration experienced in retrieving such papers has lately prompted many libraries with the necessary resources to index the individual conference papers as separate bibliographical units, something akin to the practice involving individual journal articles. The basic citations comprise the name of author, title of paper, name, date and location of the conference, and the pagination. In fact, many libraries have successfully organized control of their conference papers by using KWIC-KWOC index systematically. This as specific as the titles allow. In addition, it is more user-friendly in that all the entries in it - author, title, subject and others - are made in a combined sequence using the dictionary approach. As such, they are of great success in providing instant cross reference. In fact, libraries should always attempt to index papers in a way that enables readers to retrieve information easily, rather than relying on the method of the conventional subject catalogue. The conventional library catalogue with long classmarks is perhaps useful to libraries, but is not user friendly and could inhibit accessibility. Its other limitations are that it is labour-intensive, time-consuming and very costly to prepare and keep up-to-date, without computer facilities.

It is happy to note that bibliographical control of conference proceedings on the whole has improved in recent years, despite the fact that it is still far from adequate when compared with that for published materials. There are still no comprehensive bibliographies of papers of

local origins in many countries. This is mainly due to the peculiarities of the conference organizers discussed earlier, and not entirely to the quantity and complexity of the materials generated. In addition, there are papers that forbid reproduction or quotation. The absence of Legal Deposit Acts for unpublished materials is also responsible for the exclusion of conference papers from national bibliographies indexing and abstrating services.

In the absence of a central collection and recording system, bibliographical control of conference papers has to depend almost entirely on the initiatives of commercial and institutional organizations (Warner 1988: 159). Occasionally some conference papers may be cited in certain subject bibliographies. But, these reference tools are fragmentary at best and they present the further disadvantage of having a cut-off date. They, moreover, cover only the items known to the compilers. It will be interesting to speculate whether these locally generated listings would form the basis of union listings at the national level to overcome the frustration involved in using listings that are fragmented and produced in different formats, incorporating different arrangements and organizing principles. This inevitably would have to depend on the willingness of many libraries to share their knowledge and experience with a common aim. If such a cooperation is not forthcoming, it may not be easy to obtain up-to-date information which is obviously critical for this category of materials.

There is at present also a long time lag between the presentation of papers at conferences and their publication, and again between their acquisitions and their eventual appearance on the library shelves. Solution to these problems is beyond the means of many individual libraries. They simply lack trained and experienced staff and the financial resources. In most libraries, the staff handling conference papers work only on a part-time basis. As such, they can only afford to process the materials on a 'voluntary basis' whenever possible. Most bibliographical projects undertaken on this basis are likely to be abandoned when the compilers leave or are transferred elsewhere.

The improvement already achieved in bibliographical control of conference papers has inevitably created a greater awareness of the materials and a consequent increase in the demand for them. To meet the increased demand, an effective retrieval system is essential, if the library is not to be seen as merely a storage medium.

READERS SERVICES

Libraries are rightly regarded as sources of information and materials, expanding the role the bookstores and publishers play in promoting the

spread of information and materials. Thus, the acquisitions of materials is of little use unless they are made easily accessible to users. Accessibility is dependent on the attitude of the library staff, the size and organization of the materials, the hours of service, publicity and bibliographical control. Conversely, factors such as insufficiently trained and knowledgable staff to maintan and service the materials, the lack of publicity by the library and its lack of public awareness or appreciation of the potential value of the materials can make the acquired materials inaccessible.

Conference papers held in libraries are often overlooked and thus register a relatively lower rate of usage than books or journals. One of the main reasons is that conference papers are accorded general subject headings, thus making them indistinguishibly lost in the mix of other papers. Clearly, access to and usage of the materials and information involve more than their availability. It requires the libraries to play an active role in creating public awareness about them. No matter how much time is spent on publicity, it is always insufficient in terms of its effectiveness. Nevertheless, public education is a responsibility that the libraries have to assume continously. There are several possible ways to promote user awareness of conference papers in the libraries. These include announcements, exhibitions and displays, handouts, instruction in library use, active reference services, in-house index and bibliographies and the involvement of the faculty. This instruction and awareness service will be much appreciated by graduate students and researchers, requiring specialised materials regularly. Clearly, awareness by itself may not result in increased utilization unless there is a need to use the materials in question.

Researchers normally depend upon libraries for access to conference papers, although libraries are not necessarily the only place storing them. This is partly because librarians, being professionally involved in the flow of information are seen to be in the best position to promote the use of conference papers. As most libraries do not index these materials item by item, there is perhaps no other class of materials whose value and accessiblity to readers is more dependent on skilled library personnel and their interpersonal communications. Few libraries, however, can afford to employ extra staff to cope with the growing size and diversity of the collection. Most libraries probably have one professional working part-time, supported by a clerical assistant. These professionals are constantly overworked and overstretched despite the adoption of various tools made available by modern communication technology. As such, readers often have to resort to bibliographical tools or classification schemes which may be unfamiliar to them. The irony is in some libraries the professionals may not be aware that they already have the papers of a particular conference. This may entail unnecessary duplicate orders, interlibrary loans or even

referring readers to libraries elsewhere. The obvious paradox is that as more materials are acquired, more of them will remain unattended, possibly unknown, and certanly unused, for a long time.

The next factor directly affecting the accessibility or otherwise of a library's collection of conference papers is its organization. The are basically two methods in which these materials can be organized. The first method, favoured by some librarians is to integrate them physically with the books; while the second approach is to keep them as a special collection - separated physically from the general library stock. Both methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Although the decision to choose either one or the other method is merely an adminsitrative one, it does directly affect the search strategies used by the general reader. The overridding purpose of an integrated approach is essentially to ensure equal bibliographical accessibility, physical availability, professional services and status as compared to the other library materials. This approach views the value of the conference papers as being basically the same as that of books. It not only encourages more browsing, but also means that the circulation policy for these materials is not different from the one affecting other materials. That being so, wider accessibility and utilization of the materials is assured. Segregating conference papers from the general book collection tends to make them relatively inaccessible to users as materials in closed-stack collections can only be used for reference within their particular confines.

On the other hand, libraries that favour a separate collection approach for conference papers often argue that such an approach can produce a collection of managable size, something akin to the physically separated collections of serials or non-book materials in most libraries. Assembled together, instead of being dispersed in the library, these materials offer readers better access in a more congenial environment. Readers can also have a better idea of the range of materials available. This, however, may only be true of libraries having a big collection of conference papers.

To meet the request for materials unavailable in the library, some means of access to external resources should be developed. This means that access to other libraries is as important, if not more so as owning the materials. There are two ways in which a library may obtan materials it does not have: through referral to another library, and through inter-library loans. As no library can possibly have everything it needs, all libraries do belong to some local, national, or international cooperative network. Since most libraries have reprographic machines that can reproduce copies of materials at the touch of a button, they can easily supply photocopies on-demand to the requesting library, provided that the supplying libraries are willing to do so. This can be done without contravening the copyright law, because university and research libraries

are institutions specifically authorised to make copies for research purposes. Thanks to modern technology, 'library materials' can now literally travel to the user in far away places, and the user need not travel to the materials as in the past. Thus, by playing an increasing role in the multiplication process of papers which might otherwise remain unobtainable, libraries are becoming 'intermediate' publishers themselves.

Another form of interlibrary cooperation is the provision of the referral service offered by libraries to their clients for materials unavailable on interlibrary loan for a variety of reasons. This option is, however, open only in cases where the library to which the reader is referred is physically within easy reach of the reader. Resource sharing is no doubt essential in supplementing a library's resources, but it is worth attempting only if it is pursued earnestly. To ensure reliable, timely and high quality services, all requests must have complete and correct bibliographical details. It is not enough just to know that the materials are available in other libraries. With resource sharing, libraries can concentrate on acquiring materials of actual or potential relevance to the research being conducted in parent institutions.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, the discussion in this general survey has revealed the bare-bones of the problems of access to conference papers, as an important issue in librarianship. Although the picture presented covers a broad international spectrum rather than being a case study of a particular country, the main characteristics and some of the problems concerning production, acquisitions, bibliographic control and readers services are similar in all countries. The difference between them is only one of degree and emphasis.

With academic conferences taking place with an ever increasing frequency, many scholars and researchers find it extremely hard to attend even meetings of special interest to them. They try to keep up with the latest advance in their fields by reading conference proceedings, if they are available in their institutional libraries. This is where acquisitions of conference papers by libraries is of such crucial importance. In point of fact, no library can boast of providing full services unless it can also make these materials available. These materials represent a significant, indeed an integral, part of information resources so crucial to research and decision making. In the more affluent libraries, the materials are more readily available and regularly updated, thus providing an indispensable supplement to conventional resources of books and journals. In general, however, these materials tend regretably to be among the most neglected and under-utilized library holdings. The root cause of this paradox is the

lack of public awareness of what is available, either in local libraries or elsewhere. In order to meet the information needs of the clients, all the concerned libraries need to cooperate in overcoming problems of acquisitions and tearing down barriers to access. The application of computer-based technology in the West has freed library staff from routine drudgery, thus leaving them relatively free to concentrate on improving library services, for example, by switching requests from one library to the next, when the need arises. For smaller and less endowed libraries, however, an automated information system with on-line transmission is not only a heavy financial burden, it is also extremely difficult to operate effectively and efficiently as they may lack staff with the required level of computer literacy. The problem can at least partially be resolved by building up inter-library cooperation, especially in terms of interconnecting existing collections. Clearly, this requires leadership of the highest order on the part of library management. It is a daunting challenge. But, the challenge will have to be met head on in order to promote a more systematic and effective sharing of resources, especially conference papers, than seems to be the case now.

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