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# Collections Development and Management

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**I**N the Middle Ages books were precious things attached to the reading pulpits by chains, handwritten on parchment as they were. It was every monastery's pride to hold as many written codices as possible and to keep them in good shape.

With the invention of printing books with loose types on paper the price level was drastically changed but books were nevertheless for a long time rather expensive. It took still rather long time and much handicraft to make them and they were not produced in large quantities. Therefore the same attitude prevailed at the libraries of the time: The general aim was to try to get as many books as possible, within the bounds of available funds or other means to acquire books. During the 17th and 18th centuries librarians and scholars

from peripheral countries like Sweden — and perhaps Portugal — travelled around Europe to purchase books and to establish contacts with academic and other learned institutions to arrange for agreements concerning future exchange of literature. Many books were also collected as war trophies. During the 18th century the first scientific journals appeared but still in a small number and issued not so frequently.

The persons in charge of research libraries at that time worked towards the goal to acquire as many books and journals as possible within the subject fields adequate to their library. Their ambitions were great. They often had to struggle to get appropriate and sufficiently large premises for their libraries but as far as this was accomplished their acquisition programme was simple: As

much as possible within the given frame.

We find the same approach to acquisition activities at libraries nearly up to our own days. When I started my career as professional librarian some 35 years ago the fact that one Swedish university library had acquired a certain book did not give another Swedish university library reason not to order it; on the contrary it gave the incentive to purchase it.

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Not so long ago several rich American university libraries put blanket orders with book dealers and book agencies in foreign countries, asking them to deliver whatever was published in their country within a wide subject range. They even bought entire bookstores or great private book collections, both in USA and abroad. This kind of acquisition technique is no longer common, for more than one reason: Few, if any, libraries can afford to purchase such an amount of literature. Further, they have not the manpower to cope intelligently with so much material, e.g. one American university library had

in 1970 a backlog of over one million uncatalogued volumes. Finally they do not have space enough to store it — and space is expensive. Some librarians and scholars still have a vision of a library as the comprehensive, all-embracing arsenal of human knowledge. Very few huge libraries in the world seem to support this vision, but the great majority of research libraries have to face the fact that they cannot be self-reliant.

After the World War Two, when conditions were gradually getting more or less normal again, a lot of then unclassified research found its way all over the world in an enormous flow of scientific literature, which lead to the so-called «Information Explosion». Some criteria of this situation were stated: Scientists working in the world today outnumber the total number of Scientists ever active before. The growth of scientific information is exponential.

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It seems as if conditions have been stabilized during the last decade and

the growth curves have somewhat levelled out, but the amount of scientific documents is still embarrassingly great and will certainly be so also in the future. New scientific laboratories and research institutions will be established in countries now under development and from them new additions to the flood of scientific literature will come. The director of the library where I first worked used to say that mankind is running the risk to be choked by its own intellectual excrement.

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Library researchers of the post-war period took an increased interest in bibliometric analysis of how literature is used, and some basic finds were provided. Bradford and Zipf found that in a given subject field a rather small percentage of existing scientific journals covered a very high percentage of requested articles. This means that a library can cover say 80 percent of the literature demand within a given subject field with say 100 journals — so-called core journals — but needs additional 600 journals to be able to give an absolutely complete service. It is

obvious that this has economic implications: It costs a lot more to subscribe to 700 journals than to 100, even if the difference is less than you may think. Core journals are often more expensive than peripheral ones which furthermore are more easy to get by an exchange agreement. To acquire an additional 600 journals, however, costs a lot of money in terms of acquisition routines including periodicals checking, not to speak of the fact that you must have shelves for them. A large collection of very rarely requested journals in a library must be looked upon as a ballast which is not only heavy to house but also very expensive to handle and consequently hardly cost-effective. In Sweden, and certainly in many other Western countries, much attention has been given during the last few decades to muster the libraries' collections of periodicals and to discard and stop the inflow of periodicals which are very seldom used. At one Swedish university library in this way something between 1000 to 2000 periodicals were weeded out during the seventies with no negative effect observed.

Many librarians find it hard to part from periodicals which have been coming to the library for many years, decorating and warming the shelves in nice long rows. There is also an intellectual resistance to do away possible sources of research material. My first library director whom I quoted earlier also used to

talk about «the Mendel complex». The results of the now famous 19th century scientist who laid the foundations of modern genetics were forgotten for nearly 40 years because they were published in a very modest and little known Austrian society publication. Librarians of today are, said my boss, terrified by the thought that they would repeat that once again by weeding out publications which seem modest but perhaps contain brilliant but unobserved discoveries which can still be valuable.

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The danger of weeding material at the individual library is today small. The IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) UAP, Universal Availability of Publications, program aims at access to publications wherever they are published. This is an ambitious program and not to full extent realized, but mostly you can rely on it and send requests of needed literature to the focal point for interlending in the country concerned. Also, if the material weeded out is not destroyed but

collected by a national repository library you make certain that it is not obliterated from this world but can be required by interlending. What I mean here with a repository library is an institution which collects material which other libraries have sorted out just because it is no longer so much used that it entitles it to draw on a limited space. The ideal pattern for a repository library is, of course, that it keeps only one copy of each deposited title, which is fairly easy to accomplish if you put incoming material in alphabetical order. We can add here that the likelihood for finding the literature requested in one of the world's very well supplied libraries, e.g. The British Library, Document Supply Centre at Boston Spa, is extremely good. You also have to keep in mind that articles in journals, especially in technology and natural sciences, generally are comparatively short and therefore easy to deliver in form of copies.

A simple rule is that it is easier not to bring new items to the collection than to weed them out later, with all that involves in terms of picking out catalogue cards etc. A Swedish colleague of mine used to say that the waste-paper basket is the librarian's best friend — and he was then thinking of the librarian in an inputting position.

In other words — it is as important to consider thoroughly what you put into your collections as to get rid of unneeded material which has en-

cumbered the collections so far. That means that you have to elaborate a well-reasoned programme for your acquisition. Such a programme is a must for a library to survive in a situation where economic constraint makes it necessary for the library to convince its responsible body about the library's efficiency and capability of using money to do the right things in the right way.

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You are perfectly right to ask in what way you can create a good acquisition policy. It goes without saying that you have to put a lot of intellectual work on this and that you have to do it in collaboration with your set of customers and by analysis of their library activities. It is for instance of great importance

to make wise decisions concerning future subscriptions of periodicals. One simple measure to gauge the need for a new journal is to count the number of interlibrary requests you have sent for this journal. In Sweden there has been developed a special module for local use together with the national library computer network which provides such and similar information in an easy way.

Due to what we have said about the costs of periodicals and their tendency to remain more or less unchanged whatever efforts we do to reduce them, the money available for purchase of monographs will gradually be less and less in an unchanged or reduced economy. Against this background it is much more important to choose the right monographs and that, in its turn, calls for a good communication with the local scientific community. Academic libraries generally have in their staff subject specialists among whose tasks the one to choose literature to be acquired is perhaps the most important. Despite their skilful work it is of importance to establish close contact with departments and institutes of the local university to get a better knowledge and understanding of its ongoing research. Maybe new expensive equipment for, say, microscopic or chemico-analytical studies must have its support in form of new monographs or congress proceedings. In Sweden and in other countries, members of the library staff

have been appointed as contact librarians with a special responsibility to keep in touch with a certain university department. This is a good strategy but not without at least one problem. In spite of the fact that most scientists are very eager to have a good university library, very few of them are willing to spend the time needed to give the contact librarian the faculty partner which is necessary for him to get his work going.

At this point I find it just to issue a warning for making the library and its acquisition too dependent upon the scientists' wishes and views which might be very shortsighted. I was recently one of the external experts in an evaluation project concerning one of the Swedish university libraries, which is operating with contact librarians. One of the researchers I interviewed complained about the lack of consistency in the library's collection building, because of — was his opinion — the fact that the contact librarians had abdicated from their right, and duty, to monitor the library's acquisition policy. The sensitivity to users' needs and wishes must consequently be balanced by the acquisition officers' professional ability to see the long perspectives.

Whatever we do on the local level, it will give better effect and have greater impact on the service if it is put into a scheme of cooperation with other libraries. The fundamental idea is, of course, that two or

more libraries by coordination of their acquisitions can together cover more titles than what each library could do individually.

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In Sweden we are, quite justly I think, very proud of the far-seeing librarians who created the Swedish union catalogue of foreign books newly acquired by the major research libraries already in 1886, more than one hundred years ago. I quote here some sentences from the preface to the first volume of this union catalogue, written by one of its initiators: «Together, the lists of the acquisitions of our libraries can give the scholar a rather good view over the newest literary production, at the same time as they tell how much of this production is available in our country. And what there is available in one of these libraries shall as a rule, if so needed, easily be so also in the other ones. With today's easy communications no special difficulties will occur, and the custodians of these book collections are prepared to make them cooperatively available to that end. Thus, the idea can be realized, once stated, that the public store of books belonging to

the state should be considered as one entity; its division on several places shall not prevent its common use to promote research and science.» (My translation).

Our Swedish union catalogue does not exist any longer in its printed version. It has been replaced by the aforementioned national computer system and its, for all participating libraries, common database, the LIBRIS database. This database gives not only cataloguing support and easy access to catalogue records of millions of volumes, it also transmits by its network on-line orders and gives valuable information for the acquisition activities.

By and by real acquisition plans with some sophistication and with pronounced objectives saw the light. One of the most famous is the American Farmington Plan with the goal of — here I quote from a description by Robert Vosper in 1971 — «providing somewhere, somehow in American libraries, at least one copy of every book that may be needed for research». A large number of libraries, he continues, «agreed to accept individual responsibility for specified subject fields, and at a later date for specified geographical areas, within which they would receive, catalog, and make available comprehensive collections of currently published foreign books».

The Farmington Plan was conceived and launched during the forties and got at least one follower

with which I am rather familiar, namely the Scandia Plan. This plan, which comprised Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, was by and large tailored after the Farmington Plan model and started in the middle of the fifties. Great emphasis was put on so-called peripheral literature, under the assumption that the central literature, the one often asked for, was taken well care of.

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Much attention was paid to the Scandia Plan by foreign librarians who especially noted the fact that four different countries were able to cooperate in this way. But, in spite of the first, rather successful years, the plan seemed a bit outmoded after a couple of decades for at least two reasons: First, the Scandia Plan was pursued voluntarily by the libraries with no economic compensation. It made it harder and harder to fulfill the agreement, especially regarding the peripheral literature, when ordinary funds were more and more insufficient to acquire and cope with even the central literature; secondly the modern electrostatic copying

technique had made its entry, and the library which nowadays is called The British Library Document Supply Centre had started its activities.

In stead of following an American model Scandinavian countries have of late looked at Germany with its «Sondersammelgebiete» and «Schwerpunktsbibliothek», another cooperation undertaking of respectable age. This has lead to the establishment of libraries with special responsibility for a rather wide subject field. The responsibility does not only concern the collections and their possible shortcomings, but also the weeding out, the interlending traffic, bibliographic and educational achievements. The Swedish authority in charge of such libraries — the Royal Library's Office for National Planning and Coordination — calls these libraries in English «National Resource Libraries». A recent evaluation of such libraries in Finland — where they have been operative for a rather long time — shows that they are and have been very valuable components of the Finnish library community.

Even in the United States the Farmington Plan is now little but a glorious memory. Much more attraction has been devoted to a system for analysis and planning of collections and acquisition produced within the Research Library Group — a union of the major academic libraries in USA — and described in 1983 by its originators Nancy E. Gwinn and

Paul Moscher in the journal *College & Research Libraries*. The system is called *Conspectus* and it is especially useful as an instrument for analysis

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and description of existing collections and for forming guidelines for future acquisitions. It defines six levels of coverage of the literature within a subject field — none, minimal, basic, teaching, research, and comprehensive. These levels are applied to the different classes or groups of a classification system to depict the existing collection and — with the same or with other level codes — the ambition for future acquisitions. *Conspectus* was originally used in the Research Library Group's computer network RLIN as a sort of mapping to give libraries information about what they have the right to expect of other libraries in the network regarding a certain subject. Thus, it was — and is — the backbone of a cooperative acquisi-



tion scheme. A very good point with *Conspectus* is that it applies excellently in local use, in constructing the acquisition programme of an individual library which is an indispensable part of its collection management. In preparing such a programme you are not only creating a useful guide for future acquisition as well as deacquisition of existing collections. As it is impossible to do this job without near contact with the users, it gives, as a spin-off effect, evidence of the library's readiness to create a library not for librarians but for its users.

**With acquisition I mean the intellectual work of selecting what is worth the money and the effort to get and keep, and the technical procedure you have to go through to really get it.**

With that we are back at the individual library and to the subject of this paper — collections development. I have not made any definitions here of what 'acquisition' stands for but I would like to close by developing this a little further. With acquisition I mean the intellectual work of selecting what is worth the money and the effort to get and keep, and the technical procedure you have to go through to really get it. This procedure can, as everybody knows, be lead along different chan-

nels. You can put a purchase order at a domestic or foreign book agency, you can refer to an exchange agreement, or you can beg to get the book or periodical free of charge. When talking of acquisition policy I think it is important to stress that the kind of channel must not affect the selective decision. We have to be equally fastidious if we pay for the book as if we get it free or seemingly free of charge. When it concerns exchange agreements it is important to analyse if the publications you receive really compensate not only for the publications you send but also for the labour and other costs — space, perhaps binding etc. — you have to pay. In Sweden the Royal Library (i.e. the National Library) and the six university libraries receive as legal deposit a copy of each Swedish imprint, for the university libraries daily newspapers excluded. The university libraries are not forced to keep everything they get and at least the younger Swedish university libraries generally resist the temptation to do so. The prints delivered are dealt with from the same point of view as other potential objects of acquisition, and material not needed is sent to other libraries with better use of it or destroyed; the material must not come into the market.

Library work is conducted in a system. What you perform as an acquisition officer may be of little worth if you do not have good bibliographical control of what is

acquired, or if lending routines are slow and clumsy. In Sweden the National Resource Library for Technology has used a lot more of the funds it gets for its national task to improve its own and collaborating libraries' interlending routines than to strengthen collections.

**No library, however, is selfsufficient in these days and therefore cooperation in networks, national and international, and smooth and effective interlending are as necessary prerequisites for the excellent service the library will give and its customers will have.**

Maurice Line uses to say that in the future libraries will be judged after their service, not after their collections. I think that a good collection, well selected and disposed, forms the platform for good service. No library, however, is selfsufficient in these days and therefore coopera-

tion in networks, national and international, and smooth and effective interlending are as necessary prerequisites for the excellent service the library will give and its customers will have.

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