

## Werk

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## **Communication of the Board of the Groupe des Cartothécaires de LIBER (GDC 94.878)**

### **Transition and parallel developments**

#### **New ways**

All around the world there is a development to automatize or digitize information. Not only because information is more speedily given, but even more so because the contents of information can be manipulated and more easily transferred to other places than where it was originally produced or stored. Such developments mean that the places of dissemination may change and that other information flows may come into existence. It may mean that information becomes more democratized, though that is a questionable premise, seen the infrastructure and equipment which is momentarily needed.

However, does this mean that older sources of information can be discarded or become less valuable. Even if enough infrastructure can be created and enough equipment can be installed, can all older sources be transferred to digital media and will it be worth the effort.

In many science-fiction novels people in far away times sometimes own a few real paper books, which are treasured as items of special sophistication or as heirlooms. As if the whole world would be living in another dimension, that of cyberspace or the metaverse. History teaches us that no invention is perfect and that only later posterity may perceive that obsolete artefacts, media or technologies even in modern times can have their usefulness. Why then are new media so overwhelmingly swift superseding traditional ones and is this a desired objective.

People working in libraries, archives and documentation-centres have been from time immemorial guardians of historical and cultural records, some for the worst, most for the best. We see it as our task to provide the information we manage in the right format to our customers and as speedily as we can. For some these customers are limited to the institutions they are part of, for some it is the world at large. But, we see it also as our duty to conserve the information we have gathered in the best possible way in order that future clients or generation can profit from it. These two drives or desires may clash if we let ourselves be

overpowered by new technologies and media. Even when we are forced to go along in developments at the same time we must evaluate how our changing working-practices may influence the availability and use of information.

### **Access**

We have a lot of information under our guardianship which has not yet been fully accessed. Most of us have catalogues or lists of the maps and atlases in our collections, which have been created in time with all the faults of these times. We try to alleviate these faults by digitizing these lists and catalogues by retroconversion. However a lot of the materials have never been fully accessed. This we try to alleviate by retro-cataloguing. In both these processes we are mainly concerned with traditional materials, e. g. loose maps, charts, wall-maps, atlases, globes, aerial photographs etc. During the last conference in Barcelona (1992) Dirk de Vries argued whether this is a sensible thing to do and whether we should not concentrate our efforts instead in accessing those materials which are almost never catalogued, i. e., maps in books and periodicals. At the same time we are confronted with whole new vista's of spatial information in the form of remote-sensing, digital maps and GISses, not to mention the possibilities the Internet and the like can offer. These not only prove difficult to access and store but also force us to create new selection processes. In a capsule: What to select and how, if necessary, to conserve them in such a manner that they will be available in future.

We can not have all, but neither should we let ourselves be forced to choose between the one or the other, between the traditional and the new media. Even those who only need up-to-date information must have a thought about how our historic records must be preserved. We must make our managers, and they in their turn the politicians aware of the fact that this is not just a matter for us to decide, but that this has far wider ramifications. We do not have to solve the problem for them. It is enough if we can make them aware of the dangers and profits which go with a rapid transfer of technology.

### **Promotion**

In our last conference in Barcelona we discussed the issue of diffusion and promotion of cartographic materials. Some products in digital format we demonstrated which showed new ways for promoting spatial information. However we are at the beginning of the transition-period and it would be unwise not to use the knowledge we have built up in our past careers as mapcurators. When our clients ask for certain spatial information without requesting a specific source, we still have to direct them to the document which is the most appropriate for the occasion. And this document could be, and also will be in

future, a paper/parchment or alike medium or an electronic medium, depending on its content, execution or availability.

The same as we should think about accessing those documents which up till now have not been accessed yet we should think about promoting the properties of the same documents, as it is our task to make as many as possible (re)sources available to the public and the sciences we serve.

### **Choices**

When we are involved in a time of transition it is very easy, for feelings of security, to choose for one or the other. That is, one can totally rely on our traditional holdings, because we know them best, because more of them are accessed, because we know how to handle them, how to care for them, how to write about them. However such an approach may let the materials we conserve evolve into museum pieces. At the other hand one can easily fall for the magic of the new technologies, as they seem to promise to solve a lot of our traditional problems of space in stackrooms, access, promotion and several others. But one may fall for it without taking into account all the consequences.

The most difficult is to try to find a balance between the one approach and the other. When new technologies become available choosing for a new approach is in first instance an act of belief. Even scientists cannot promise truth, they only can promise new possibilities. Society may request from us, curators of part of its cultural heritage, to approach these new technologies and products with caution. And when they prove promising to investigate them upon their possible uses and to apply these new technologies to our traditional holdings and, if possible, to integrate them with these traditional holdings.

### **Co-operation**

As none of us is perfect we can try to find this balance best in co-operation as some of us are better versed or more advanced in the one field and some better in the other. Also it can be a matter of financing which may force us to choose. Together we constantly must evaluate our traditional working practices and evaluate the possibilities new developments allow. As the possibilities for co-operation enlarge with the integration of the European countries we must try to be aware of opportunities to work together and share resources and knowledge.

We hope that this conference will give new opportunities for these processes in order that we can function and serve better.