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The European Register of Microform Masters (EROMM)

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When some decades ago libraries began microfilming their books they did this in the first place to provide service to users working elsewhere and unable to come to the library and read a certain work in its original form.

There are a number of main reasons why the book in its original paper format may not be sent to the user,

- the work has to remain in the library because it is an important source of reference or because it is frequently used for other reasons,
- the work is too valuable to be sent away,
- the user wishes to dispose of the work for a period longer than interlending regulations allow,
- the physical condition of the original makes it impossible to hand it out to users.

This shows that improving access to a work has been the primary reason for microfilming, the aspect of preservation only came last. Things have changed a lot since then. The pressing problem of decaying paper has increased awareness everywhere of the need to preserve printed information.

Preservation and access

There is little need here to give a summary of the huge effort that has been made in developing preservation techniques during the last twenty years. Let me only point out some points.

1 Paper presented at the LIBER Annual Conference, Göttingen 1994.

For some time attempts to increase the life expectation of original materials, the book's paper and binding, have looked most attractive to librarians. Different methods to achieve this have been developed. Some of them have proved to be quite successful in mass treatment of large numbers of books. Especially the technology of mass deacidification and strengthening has been making important progress recently, though treatment of old and decaying material remains a problem.

To preserve printed information contained in books with already brittle paper the most widespread method remains microfilming and it is getting even more important every year. In spite of new technical developments it will remain the most common way of reformatting, that is converting information from its original paper into another format, for some time to come.

Technically speaking preservation microfilming is a standard procedure. Equipment is at hand in any major library for producing a microfilm according to national as well as international standards. Most of those institutions are able to provide duplicates on microform or paper.

According to recent evaluations the black & white silver microfilm will last about 300 years without significant loss of information. In comparison electronic storage media do not have a comparable life-expectation. And what may be more important still, computer technology is in a phase of intense innovation; this means that we can hardly expect to have electronic equipment in fifty years time that will be compatible with electronic formats used today.

Against the option of preserving the original book conversion of printed information into microform has two decisive advantages:

1st á The filmed book can be duplicated as often as needed and in any shape, microform and paper. By using scanning technique computer files too, may be produced directly from the microform.

2nd á For direct use of the microform readers and reader printers are available in every modern library. In addition the book itself will be protected against damage caused by handling by the use of the microform.

Coordinated effort

In terms of cost microfilming is relatively expensive: a significant contribution to preserving as many books as possible can only be made, if duplicate microfilming of books can be avoided. Remember the problem we are facing: The literary and scientific production of the last 150 years, which is stored in print media is in danger of being lost because of decaying paper. Theoretically no less than 80% of present library holdings are threatened.

To coordinate parallel filming activities of libraries a register containing information about books already filmed can serve as a useful instrument. Every single book that is to be filmed can be checked before being put under the camera to see whether or not it has been microfilmed somewhere else. Naturally this checking has to be done by every microfilming agency.

Computerised registers have been created in a few countries. Collecting the relevant information on a national level alone, however, is insufficient, since filming activities cannot reasonably be restricted to books produced in one country: International exchange of print media is no modern phenomenon but almost as old as the art of printing itself.

In this context the "European Register of Microform Masters" has been created as a central database of truly international character. Anybody who wishes to microfilm a book, may check the Register to find out whether the title is already on the list of filmed books. If it is, a copy of the book in question can be ordered from the agency owning the master, and funds reserved for preservation microfilming can be used for reformatting other items. Acquiring a copy is far less expensive than doing the filming and related work all over again.

The EROMM project

The European Register of Microform Masters, set up as an international pilot database in January 1993 at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, has started with filing data of microform masters from four European countries (France, Great Britain, Germany, and Portugal).

The project phase of the EROMM-project began in February 1991 and ended in October 1993. As an European Union project, it had been financed to 60% by the Commission of the European Communities and to 40% by the Commission on Preservation and Access, Washington (U.S.A.). The French national library had been charged with managing the project. The three other partner libraries were the British Library (London), the Instituto da Biblioteca Nacional e do Livro (Lisbon) and the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek (Göttingen).

Every partner library had to collect existing and new microform master data from its own computerised catalogue and from affiliated libraries, to convert records into the bibliographic format UNIMARC, and to send them to Paris to be filed in the EROMM. All data were merged into one database using the extended UNIMARC format as internal working format of this international pilot database. At this stage EROMM contained about 50.000 records of microfilmed items.

Output has been provided on microfiche and magnetic tape during the project phase. Thereby the partners were able to give information about works microfilmed elsewhere to all microfilming libraries in their respective countries.

EROMM as a permanent service

The last months of the project have been devoted to the task of defining the conditions under which EROMM can be run as a permanent service: Funding, legal and organisational status, admitting new partners, and technical options for the use and updating of EROMM have been the main issues considered.

The partners agreed on three guiding principles as a precondition for the inclusion of microform master records with EROMM:

A The agency producing microforms must adhere to international technical standards (ISO)[2].

B Duplicates of microforms have to be available on request.

C Unhindered and low cost exchange of microform master data is a precondition to preserve a significant part of the world's printed heritage by coordinated microfilming.

For organising the exchange of data several options exist. The one adopted is essentially the same as the one that had been praticed during the project phase, involving different infrastructure in different countries.

There is the national library with considerable microfilming and cataloguing activity of its own working as EROMM partner (BNF, Paris). In the second case a national library serves as relay for a number of cooperating libraries, which merges the records before sending them to EROMM (BL, London). The third case has a computing centre serving a library network with interactive cataloguing of microform masters (SUB, Göttingen). After transforming the records into UNIMARC those institutions, who are working as direct EROMM partners, file them on data carrier and send the latter to the EROMM host, who will load them on the EROMM database.

The host will provide every partner with magnetic tapes of updated data. However online access to the EROMM database is the preferred option for most partners now, as this will spare them the effort of running their own parallel database with identical information. All libraries affiliated to an EROMM partner will have this online access as well.

At present no direct online cataloguing is intended for EROMM. There are obvious reasons for this: Libraries in general do their microform master cataloguing in their own electronic catalogue; the effort of doing it a second time for

2 ISO 4331 (1986, rev. Oct. 1988). *Photography - Processed photographic black-and-white film for archival records - Silver-gelatin type on cellulose ester base - Specifications.* ISO 4332 (1986, rev. Oct. 1988). *Photography - Processed photographic black-and white film for archival records - Silver- gelatin type on poly(ethylene terephthaliaic) base - Specifications.* ISO 5466 (1986). *Photography - Processed safety photographic film - Storage practices.*

EROMM would involve additional manpower. On the other hand the extraction of microform master records for EROMM is comparatively inexpensive and easy once a routine process has been established. The second reason for not using the technical option of online cataloguing is the existence of differing cataloguing rules and local bibliographic formats. Uniform points of access for interactive cataloguing in different systems do not exist yet - though things might change soon.

Already during the project phase two partners (SUB and IBL) worked on tools that can help to overcome technical obstacles limiting EROMM participation to those libraries that work within a modern information network. By adapting two alternative PC running programs[3] it is possible now to include libraries, that cannot rely on much more than stand alone PCs, in the process of coordinated preservation microfilming.

Administration

At this point a word has to be said about the administrative and legal basis of the EROMM service.

After analysing a number of different organisational models it has been decided to establish EROMM as a service provided by a host library. In contrast to the possibility of creating an organism of its own this seems to offer the best chances to keep cost as low as possible. It is estimated that in routine function EROMM will not require more than one person working half time for administrative and library tasks and another working half time for computing. If this is true, it is not rational to employ personnel devoted to EROMM exclusively. Instead qualified staff of the host library shall work for EROMM only as much as is needed.

To supervise and direct EROMM's work and to decide on questions of principle a steering committee has been formed, in which every partner is represented. The presidency of the steering committee is taken by every partner in a fixed sequence. Meeting at least once a year the committee receives the host library's reports and votes on the budget proposals for the coming year. Another function of the steering committee is to review applications of institutions that apply for membership in the EROMM group. Note that expenses partners have when attending meetings will not be covered by the EROMM budget. This again is meant to keep overall cost low.

3 CDS/ISIS and Allegro C.

Installing the EROMM database

As I said before, the pilot database for the EROMM project has been created by the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. Early in 1994 the SUB Göttingen was chosen as host for EROMM in the working phase. The records were filed in the SUB's own system. This system is working with Pica software, which is renowned for its unique facilities for data access and diversified use. For the first time the new EROMM database was opened for online access from abroad in December 1994.

Libraries that wish to use the EROMM data are given their own user ID and password. By the way of Internet or X.25 they then are able to search for titles of works that they are about to microfilm. If they don't find the work in question, they may proceed to do the microfilming. At the same time they shall produce records of all works microfilmed and send them at short intervals to the agency charged with collecting and converting microform master records into UNIMARC at the regional or national level. From there it will be delivered to EROMM and consequently prevent other users of this database from doing the same job once more.

The effectiveness of EROMM in preventing duplicated effort in preservation microfilming may greatly increase when libraries announce their definite plan to microfilm a work even before putting the book under the camera. The EROMM record structure provides for a tag where this information may be filed.

Access

Let me return to where I began speaking about microfilming: It is quite clear that preservation is but one aspect of this activity. How, you may ask, will the user be given access to the works preserved as microform?

A partial answer may be given in case the EROMM partners decide to use the following technical option: The Pica system used for filing the microform master records has an ordering facility by which a service copy of a title retrieved could be ordered from the agency where it is available. Technically it will be possible to place an order for a service copy by using a simple command. The order could then be transmitted online to the responsible distributing agency if it is accessible in this way. If such a link does not exist an automated fax transmission of the order may serve as an alternative.

I am very much in favour of testing the capability and effectiveness of libraries and other agencies to provide service copies. This alone will prove whether coordinated preservation microfilming really lives up to our expectation.

It is obvious even before starting with such a test, that we have to rely on the very diverse capabilities of libraries to respond to such orders. How much time will be needed, what price will be charged, and what quality will service copies

have? No doubt the group of EROMM partners and other relevant bodies will have to make some effort to try to establish standards in this field.

Several models of interlibrary cooperation could well be an outcome of this. Individual libraries could choose to deposit printing masters made from their preservation masters with an agency whose duty it would be to provide service copies on demand from users and from other libraries. This would take the task of dealing with orders off the individual libraries and enhance standards of response (time, price, and quality).

Starting phase of EROMM as permanent service & new partners

Installing the database and building routine relations between the host and the partners requires some effort on part of the SUB Göttingen who took on the function of EROMM host. The system on which the database runs is PICA using a TANDEM computer instead of the French BN-OPALINE using a BULL computer. The change of system required adaptation work and establishing input and output facilities for full UNIMARC records carrying microform information.

Some records delivered to EROMM were produced by libraries, that use non-standard character coding in their own system. In case those codes are not converted accurately to ISO standard, this may cause misrepresentation of certain characters and diacritics in certain records. The EROMM partners collecting data from libraries affiliated to them and the EROMM host have still to invest further effort to bring character coding into line. In true routine functioning automated conversion tables for different character codes shall not require any additional work by the host's personnel.

In addition to this it will be the task of the four original partners and in particular the host's duty to help new partners to get familiar with EROMM. The present EROMM group will have to design efficient measures to educate librarians in those institutions that intend to join.

Some European institutions will require special attention. To help them to get their systems adapted to minimal microform master requirements and to link up with the EROMM database it may be necessary to have an expert travel there. Among other things the expert may then help with installing computing tools on the spot.

For this period of installing permanent EROMM services the Commission on Preservation and Access (Washington) has generously offered its financial support. During the first 18 months partners will have to share only 55% of the cost among themselves. Another positive note has been set by Lower Saxony which supported the EROMM host with more than half of the funds needed in 1994.

To be more specific, partners are asked to contribute not more than DM 3,500 for the year 1995. This is calculated on the basis of 15 partners cooperating.

For the following year 1996, even without CPA's support, this amount will be the same if by then 30 partners have joined. Untill the end of 1994 five new institutions have joined bringing the total number of partners to nine who serve libraries in eight European countries[4]. When reviewing the response EROMM got so far I am optimistic that the number of EROMM partners may well rise above 30 in 1996. In the long run the effect of routine procedures for all exchanges between partners and host may further reduce real cost.

The central contribution of EROMM partners will of course be to send all microform master records they dispose of. It is expected that the total number of records filed when all present partners will have sent their data will be more than 300.000. With new partners joining this number should soon be surpassed.

4 New partners are the national libraries of Denmark, The Netherlands, and Belgium, the library of the ETH/Zurich, and the DBI/Berlin.