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Book Review

***Library Systems: a Directory & Guide.* Compiled by Juliet Leeves, John Baker, Alice Keefer, Gitte Larsen. Edited with an Overview by Juliet Leeves on Behalf of Library Information Technology Centre for the European Commission. London: TFPL Publishing, 1994. v, 401 pp.**

Computers have been creeping into libraries for more than twenty years, occupying all areas of library administration and library use. There has been a mushrooming of data processing activities in libraries all over the world, beginning with circulation, proceeding to cataloguing and acquisition, opening up new perspectives of online public access to library files and document supply, and ending, perhaps, in the concept of a 'virtual library', which, as a kind of yet another brave new world, enables the reader to make use of all the world's libraries without bothering to actually enter a single one. The 'virtual library' will leave the reader with his or her traditional job, though, that is reading the books, articles or rather, documents, to pick up contemporary terminology for a moment.

In spite of all the reshaping of traditional libraries which is due to computers, most librarians and readers would not miss them. For they have indeed facilitated both library administration and library use. What may have, over the last years, been a nuisance to librarians and readers is the discrepancy between great expectations and practical effects of library computing. Which, in turn, may be due to a fundamental misunderstanding: computers were introduced into all library administration and services in order to have various processes facilitated, from circulation to cataloguing etc. Yet to have the full advantage of library computing, computing in these various processes had to be integrated. Otherwise, it was soon discovered, computing did not contribute to rationalization of library administration and transparency and ease of library services.

In fact, 'integration' became a buzz word, very much like 'integrated library system'. Numerous integrated library systems were designed over the years, either in libraries (inhouse designs) or by commercial vendors offering 'turnkey' systems to libraries. It is little surprise that the vast market of libraries - national, public, university, special - prompted a supply of 'turnkey' systems which can, at best, be called non-transparent.

What was, and still is, needed is a survey of integrated library systems (of the commercial, turnkey variety), in fact, a guide. Juliet Leeves and her co-authors provide just that. The present book is all the more welcome since Leeves proved to provide precise and succinct surveys of the market before. Her two editions of *Library Systems: a Buyer's Guide*, published in 1987 and 1990 respectively, have already been serving as most useful guides. The only criticism that could possibly be brought forward against Leeves' previous books was rooted in their focus on the British market. It is a relief that the present book has successfully tackled that criticism by opening up to the European market in general and including also systems from overseas (if marketed in Europe). Moreover, the guide concentrates on systems that are used or available in more than just one European country.

As stated in the introduction, systems described in this guide must be integrated ones, i.e. they must support all or most of the basic library operations (acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, OPAC); they must provide for multiple simultaneous users; they must be available for installation in libraries other than those libraries or regional collectives (cataloguing co-operatives) developing the systems; the system must be viable in a European context, or, if not, suppliers must show competence to support and maintain software.

No less than 29 systems that fitted these criteria are included in the guide and described in detail. A number of systems, that did not, are at least mentioned in short entries. The dead-line for inclusion of system versions is 1st August 1993, which makes the guide reasonably up-to-date, providing for editing and production of the book. What is different, though, to Leeves' previous books is the fact that the descriptions of systems were compiled from product literature or "discussion with the supplier" rather than from inspections on installations in (reference) libraries and discussions with librarians actually using (or, at times, stuck with) it. Occasionally, though, libraries were visited as well. Of course, user groups of all systems are mentioned and relevant addresses are duly given. Pursuing that producer-oriented methodology, however, the present guide, gives away some of the 'test-report' qualities of Leeves' earlier guides.

The information provided for each system falls into two main categories: (a) the functional descriptions, written by one of the four consultants who compiled the guide; (b) information solely provided by the supplier, for instance on European languages supported by the systems, supplier profile and staff, European subsidiaries/agents, management information, future developments, technical factors (networking and other standards, operational aspects, security aspects, hardware and operating system, software), support and training, price, customer-profiles, user group.

Preserving the quality of a 'test-report', the functional descriptions break down in details on cataloguing, catalogue access, circulation control, acquisitions, serials control, inter-library loans, focusing on cataloguing and catalogue access

which are indeed fundamental to any system. To every module, a comprehensive checklist of functions is provided in an appendix to the guide.

As for functionality and integration of library operations, it is encouraging to see that 25 systems (of 29 described) provide for all but the inter-library loan module. Coming to operating systems, 22 of these library systems have a UNIX version which, as the compilers rightly observe, increases the portability of software and paves the way to open systems. UNIX, though, due to all its different versions, is not a turnkey to portability (in fact, some of the UNIX versions are quite close to proprietary operating software; in this context, the compilers of this guide carefully state that although choice of industry-standard software certainly facilitates portability in the library systems market, the purchaser of an integrated library system may still find his choice of hardware limited). In parallel to industry-standard operating systems the use of non-proprietary relational database management systems (Informix, Oracle, or Sybase) is increasing.

Within the context of shared cataloguing, the systems' facilities of record import and export as well as authority control are extensively described. Having in mind that the advantages of library automation must not be restricted to library administration, the OPAC modules are also documented (displays, menu options, help-screens, self-service features etc.).

The present guide contains a wealth of information on the state of integrated library systems. In times of rapid technical developments, one would hope for updates of this guide in due course.

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