

Werk

Titel: Zeitschriften in deutschen Bibliotheken: Bestand, Erwerbung, Erschließung, Benutz...

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Ort: Graz

Jahr: 1996

PURL: https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?514854804_0006|log32

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Book Review

Zeitschriften in deutschen Bibliotheken: Bestand, Erwerbung, Erschließung, Benutzung. Herausgegeben von der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin unter der Leitung von Hartmut Walravens. München, New Providence, London, Paris: Saur, 1995 (Bibliothekspaxis; 35). viii, 371 pp. ISBN 3-598-21166-X. DM 128,00.

Serials, to use a collective term for various types such as academic or popular journals, newspapers, CD-ROMs, monograph series items etc., have become one of the most important factors in library management. They present numerous problems for acquisition, cataloguing, storing, readers' service. Some of these problems turn out to be insurmountable: it may suffice to refer to the vicious circle of journal prices. More and more libraries are being forced to cancel journal subscriptions on a wide range that is indeed frightening. Which, in turn, contributes to yet another increase in prices which libraries have to face still capable of subscribing. Serials are the decisive factor in budgeting. On average, serials attract about 75% of the acquisition budget in German libraries, and this rate is likely to increase in the near future, leaving ever less money for monographs, textbooks and other types of library stock. As for other countries, the situation may be quite similar.

In spite of all their importance for library management and library use, there has been no study comprehensive of all aspects of serials in German libraries. Which is not that surprising. This may be due to the fact that in German libraries serials never enjoyed the prominent administrative status known from Anglo-American libraries. A relatively small range of German articles

has been devoted to the subject, and, needless to say, there has never been a German journal such as *Serials Librarian*.

The present book meets precisely the demand of a comprehensive survey. It contains 20 contributions plus an important bibliography of post-war literature on journals in German libraries.

As the editor explains, it were the editors' of *Serials Librarian* who suggested a survey of this kind. The articles may be considered pre-prints because they are to be published again in *Serials Librarian*. The present book, however, was conceived some years ago, at the time of the German re-unification. It was to be seen against a background of several problems arising from the necessity of getting together two countries and indeed two quite different library systems. The publication of the book was planned already in 1993. Yet there were some delays in finishing some contributions, and a number of contributors did not submit their papers at all. So new contributors had to be found. When the book was eventually published in the autumn of 1995, it contained papers that were completed already in 1993 as well as in 1995. In terms of up-to-dateness, then, some divergence among the papers is inevitable.

The scope of the contributions, however, is indeed wide. They include introductory surveys of serials processing in academic as well as, if to a less extent, public libraries, giving due attention to aspects such as selection of titles, descriptive cataloguing and subject indexing, and access and use. The emphasis is, quite in spite of the general title of the book, certainly on academic or research libraries; just one author writes from a decidedly public library perspective. This is confirmed by three contributions that may be seen as kind of case studies, for they are devoted to the management of serials in the Bavarian State Library, the three university libraries in Hamburg, and to the collection of East European serials in the Technische Informationsbibliothek Hannover. These case studies are quite welcome, because they

put the introductory, generalizing, handbook-type articles into the practice of individual libraries.

Having in mind that the present book may be intended not only for German readers, librarians from abroad will find those articles particularly interesting which concentrate, on a nation-wide level, on facets of serials management. Although they repeat the issues of acquisition, cataloguing, and access, it is most rewarding to have some aspects explained in full detail that are key issues to the German academic library system. First of all, the decentralised, resource sharing acquisition plan of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, that grew out of financial constraints after World War I, and has proved to be the only way of providing literature supply to meet the demand of a rapidly growing and highly specialised information market. Second, of course, the various attempts at providing nation-wide cataloguing of serials which is all the more necessary if the national library system is pointedly decentralised, as it has traditionally been in Germany. Although we have got used to the online *Zeitschriftendatenbank*, the most comprehensive database of serials in Germany (and Europe), it is good to be reminded of the roots of serials cataloguing in this country. Third, but not least, the foreign reader will find useful information on the development of the inter-library loan system in Germany. Again, the historical perspective is very welcome, although one may have wished this particular contribution (completed in 1993) to have been updated before publication, in order to reflect latest plans and developments in electronic document order and supply in German academic libraries.

The book is not limited to the traditional academic journal in paper form, though. Contributions on the management of specialised forms of serials such as microforms and CD-ROMs indicate that their part is becoming more and more important in libraries. And it is good to have an article on newspapers in

libraries and the problems they present for library management in terms of storage, preservation, and access.

A survey of serials management in libraries would not be complete without an article on the role of one of the libraries' important partners, the subscription agents. Swets are being allotted some 20 pages to present their merits in this field. Although Swets' merits are by no means to be disputed, one may have expected a more unbiased article on the role of subscriptions agents. It would have been very interesting if this contribution had been contrasted by an article that focused critically on the pricing policies and the services of several subscriptions agents. What is certainly needed, then, is a kind of market study, a sort of buyer's guide, for the variety of serials.

In spite of this deficiency and the fact that a few contributions represent 1993 state-of-the-art, the book is welcome for its wealth of information. This also goes for the two articles devoted to the library practice in the former German Democratic Republic. Focusing on acquisitions and exchange of journals from the "nicht-sozialistisches Wirtschaftsgebiet" (not-socialist economic area), the authors recall the ways and means of getting hold of Western publications in a situation characterized by economic constraints and political suspicion.

Summing up, just one critical remark on the book must be made. At DM 128, it is heavily priced. Acquisition budgets being what they are at the moment, this price may prevent the book from finding its way to the libraries.

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