

Information provision

An international seminar on politics and strategy

by Myoung Chung Wilson

Information Provision: Politics and Strategy" was the theme of the 1998 annual international seminar held under the auspices of the Bibliothekarische Auslandsstelle, Deutsches Bibliotheksinstitut (The Foreign Relations Office of the German Library Institute) in Berlin in cooperation with the Society for Political Education and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The seminar was funded by the Cultural Foundation of the "Lander" of the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Foreign Ministry in Bonn, and the British Council in Cologne.

Its purpose was twofold—to bring together librarians from different parts of the world (particularly those from Central and Eastern Europe, where libraries will play a critical role in building open and democratic societies) and to offer continuing education through an intensive seminar and study tour. The intellectual focus of the seminar was on the political, social, and economic strategies of information provision and the role of libraries and librarians in building interactive strategies in different parts of the world.

Over 50 librarians and information specialists from a variety of libraries in 22 different countries participated in the week-long seminar (June 26–July 3, 1998), followed by a study tour of selected German academic and public libraries in Wurzburg, Gottingen, Gutterloh, Marburg and Frankfurt. The venue for the conference portion of the gathering was at the Academy Frankenwarte

(Gesellschaft fur Politische Bildung, of the Friederich-Ebert Stiftung) located in Wurzburg—the heart of the Franconian country depicted as the "Pearl of the Romantic Road" of Germany, according to the 1998 *Fordor's Travel Guide*.

The seminar began with welcoming remarks by Margrit Grubmuller, director of the Academy Frankenwarte, who stressed the increasing importance of both information and communication and emphasized long-term international cooperation as one of the goals of Friederich Ebert Stiftung (who was the first democratically elected President of post-war West Germany). Elisabeth Simon, of the Foreign Relations Office of the German Library Institute and organizer of the seminar, also welcomed the participants. She underscored the increasing importance of personal contacts among librarians and users in the age of e-mail and other advanced means of communication.

The seminar's general theme of the political and strategic dimensions of information provision, had several important subthemes. Following are samples of contributions made in these areas.

Biddy Fisher from Great Britain identified government strategies for dealing with the new and emerging structure of contemporary education in the United Kingdom, where lifelong learning and distance education are emphasized. Fisher challenged librarians to have vision, creativity, and an attitude of risktaking

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to develop the skills necessary to become full partners in the emerging new learning and teaching environment.

Erdmute Lapp of Germany described the Global Info 2000 Project sponsored by Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research. This project is being developed in response to paradigm shifts in the political and socioeconomic spheres, due to the advance of information technology. It emphasizes information as a precondition for innovation in government, business, science, and technology.

Werner Schwuchow of Germany described the role of government in an information society by reviewing the development of information policy in the United States and Germany and by analyzing the general principles of policy development for publicly and privately financed information services.

Information ethics

Under the theme of information ethics, Tim Owen of the UK presented a paper on information overload in which he cogently analyzed recent Reuters' studies on information. Owen suggested that the results of these studies, published under the titles "To Know or Not To Know: The Politics of Information," "Information as an Asset: The Invisible Gold Mine," "Glued to the Screen," and "Dying for Information" are good indicators of growing, worldwide information overload.

He recommended that librarians prioritize sources, stick to these priorities, and, most important, reject information when necessary. Three case studies of institutions that are engaged in the provision of information and that have experienced transformative changes were described by H. P. Thun of Germany, Nick Moore of Great Britain, and Eduard Duijker of the Netherlands. Angelika Hesse of Germany presented a comparative study of Germany and France that noted differences in information provision in rural areas.

Under the subtheme of "Information Power: The Political Dimensions," Eisuke Naito of Japan reviewed the framework of national information policy in Japan in its historical, regional, and global contexts.

Maja Jokie from Zagreb discussed Croatia's national information policy and the fast-growing national information infrastructure in that country.

Information literacy

I presented a paper that reviewed the changing requirements for information and digital information literacy and that called for innovative instructional modes and facilities appropriate for a post-Internet environment. Walther Umstätter of Germany presented (from a European perspective) a paper on new forms of professional education that emphasize educating librarians to understand the production of knowledge and the infrastructure of scientific technical information.

Henning Nielsen of Denmark chaired a stimulating roundtable discussion where participants were asked, "Are librarians 'information literate' and how does the library help to form information literacy?" Nielsen pointed out that librarians are increasingly moving away from simply providing facts and information toward a teaching and consultancy role. The stress now is on how to provide access to, select tools for, and structure information. Not the least of the challenges now facing librarians is how to provide an end-user environment where teaching and consultancy can take place. Nielsen reminded the participants that librarianship is among the few professions whose practitioners must be information literate and must constantly challenge themselves by asking whether they possess the most up-to-date skills necessary for true information literacy.

Copyrights and services

Katharina Steinwachs of Germany introduced concepts developed by the Dutch sociologist Hofstede on management and culture in different societies. Tuula Haavisto of Finland discussed the development in 1998 of the Central and Eastern European Copyright User Platform. This platform was modeled after the European Copyright User's Platform, which has been in existence since 1992. The aim of both platforms is to help librarians to understand increasingly complex copyright issues and to use copyrights as a mechanism for delivering information democratically by promoting user rights that are fair to both authors and publishers.

Elena Nebogatikova of Russia went further by presenting a case study where the library functions as a copublisher by microfilming library materials in cooperation with Russian publishers.

Marina Novikova of Russia described the Pushkin Project of the Soros Foundation, funded by its Open Society Institute. Begun in 1997, the Pushkin Library Books Project aims to acquire and distribute the best Russian books to selected libraries within the country. The project also seeks to build an infrastructure that will connect publishers, book distributors, libraries, and readers. Novikova concluded that the ultimate goal of the project is to assist the best publishers and support intelligent readership in Russia.

Nuria Gallart of Spain described the EC Decomate II Project that is attempting to develop a digital library for economics in cooperation with several European university libraries.

Information provision between tradition and modernism

Gunter Beyersdorff of Germany pointed out the difficulties that libraries have in adjusting to discontinuous changes when there is no long-term prognosis for these changes. He noted the need for libraries to respond to emerging competitors in the field of informa-

tion provision, such as publishing companies, Microsoft, and America Online. Lastly, Beyersdorff pointed out the danger of losses that may occur from disjunctions between what is preserved in electronic publishing and what is published in books.

The proceedings of this seminar will be available in English and German from the Foreign Relations Office, the German Library Institute, House No. 2 Luisenstr. 57, 10 117 Berlin, Germany at \$35 per copy. A complete list of the papers that were presented can also be obtained. ■

Correction

In the July/August 1998 Internet Resources column "East Asian studies," the heading on page 516 should read "Individual countries/regions" rather than "Individual countries." And the four electronic journals found on page 520—*Free China Review*, *Interpoetics*, *Japan Echo*, and *Road to East Asia*—were misplaced under the Taiwan heading. The editors regret the error.



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