

Map ,Webucation': Using the World Wide Web for the Continuing Education of Map Librarians

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INTRODUCTION

This paper introduces the Working Group for Education of the Groupe des Cartothécaires (GdC) de LIBER and gives a progress report of the Group's activities from 1998 to the present. It also discusses the impact of the Working Group's decision to put up an Internet platform in terms of the opportunities, achievements, and difficulties encountered when using this particular information platform.

GOALS OF THE GROUP

At the Kraków conference of the GdC de LIBER in 1998, the Working Group for Education decided to:

- set up an Internet platform with a list of general reference works for map librarians concerning the topics, History of Cartography, Map Librarianship, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS);
- establish a ,Who is who in the LIBER Groupe des Cartothécaires' incorporated in the web site naming individuals who could be contacted about specific questions in their respective language areas;
- define minimum standards for post-educational courses in map librarianship in order to promote educational projects in their respective language areas.

The three topics, History of Cartography, Map Librarianship in general, and GIS, gained priority as result of an inquiry among map librarians made before the Kraków Conference. The decision to use the World Wide Web (WWW) was made mainly because of considerations on how best to reach everybody in the group, how to pass on information to everyone without organizing large

and frequent meetings, and how to divide up the workload most effectively among the best qualified people in their respective fields and language areas. Finally, we considered the WWW to represent both progressive educational opportunities and the most convenient way of communicating between members of the Group.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Many colleagues have contributed to the work of the Group. Jürg Bühler, the Group's Webmaster, has created a comprehensive home page¹ while Wolfgang Crom analysed the questionnaires for 'Who is who in Map Librarianship'. As of June 2000, the web pages included:

- literature for map librarianship (lists in English, French, Hungarian, and German);
- tutorials and courses for map librarianship (virtual GdC campus);
- 'Who is who in Map Librarianship';
- numerous links to related online resources (e.g. Odden's Bookmarks);
- specials e.g. a GIS discussion forum for libraries;
- translation service for certain European languages.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION WILL YOU FIND?

The online compendium serves as a tool for map librarian requests on different levels. It is addressed to all map librarians, whether full-time professionals or those who deal with maps only marginally, whether working in great libraries or small institutions with limited resources. Titles of the important introductory works are available to guide into the subject those who are in charge of a small collection. The lengthy lists of literature can be accessed alphabetically, or by language, or thematically. Links to online full text are included for citations such as the LIBER Quarterly articles dealing with map librarianship.

In the Tutorials and Courses section there are thematically structured links to more than 120 online resources of private companies and public institutions promoting cartographic knowledge.

The 'Who is who in Map Librarianship' is the result of an inquiry among map curators or librarians in the majority of the European countries sub-

scribing to LIBER. The list includes the name, institution, and address of map librarians able to help colleagues and the fields of knowledge in which they are experienced.

Map librarians specifically interested in the history of cartography are guided to Tony Campbell's History of Cartography Gateway², which has all the advantages of an up-to-date research home page being, at the same time, a discussion forum, an exhaustive collection of links, and a superb bibliography.

Browsing the numerous links can readily provide answers to specific questions. The multiple sources opened up through linking to Oddens' Bookmarks enable users to plunge further into the fascinating world of maps. There are also useful links to the IFLA-Section of Geography and Map Libraries as well as many other institutions, discussion groups, and activities related to international map librarianship.

OUTLOOK

The Internet is one of the most dynamic ways to communicate and conduct research in today's information society. The homepage of the Working Group for Education has, therefore, been designed to promote lively discussion, to be shaped through interaction, and to allow for constant growth and easy dissemination among colleagues all over Europe. This approach opens up the potential for connecting all obtainable resources. However, this vital task of reaching the desired density of information by adding and constantly reviewing new links is really too much to ask of a single person. Widespread participation of and feedback from the people at whom this web page is aimed will be necessary to secure a continuing high standard in its contents. To attain this end readers are warmly invited to study the site critically and to make comments and proposals for incorporating anything that seems important to them.

More and more interactive courses are being offered in Internet education by professional training organizations (e.g. for teachers). Some of these are good examples of new educational routines. It is desirable that similar facilities are made available for map librarians within national and international institutions (e.g. library schools, universities).

The one remaining assignment given to the Working Group for Education in Kraków – to define minimum standards for post educational courses in map librarianship – has still to be completed. This could be progressed either by drawing up and circulating another questionnaire or, preferably, through discussions around the existing Internet platform. A starting point for developing standards would be for colleagues to rate and debate the existing web

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pages. Once their suggestions have been analysed in detail, a definitive, basic profile of the ,average map librarian' could be developed.

ADVANTAGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND PROBLEMS OF NET-BASED EDUCATION,
OR THE CARTOGRAPHER'S MAIN QUESTION:
,HOW TO FIND WITHOUT GETTING LOST'?

Round the clock and ubiquitous availability are clearly the WWW's most outstanding features, though they are dependent on technical conditions which, unfortunately, are not always are within the reach of map librarians. As we know, there are still many colleagues without access to the Web. Map librarians as well as other curators greatly depend on the technical support of their fostering institutions. But using the Internet for further education is also a chance to gain the knowledge we need for dealing better with technical questions and defining the needs of a map library more accurately. Additionally, the more map librarians who collaborate, the better the argument we have when asking for technical support.

A rising flood of information rushing through the net causes its own problems. Much of the material needs to be critically revised and categorized by specialists. If this is not done, individual surfers will easily ,drown' before reaching the information for which they are looking. It is important that principles are developed and formalized by the Group in order to render them a useful tool for the effective and necessary selection of material available through the Internet. A scheme of ratings concerning suitability for the beginner or the advanced learner should introduce links, articles, and citations. For reporting experiences with tutorials etc. there should be space either in a prominent place on the web page or in e-mail discussion groups. A list of criteria for rating one's experiences should also be standardized. All this has to be developed on a broad European scale as national and regional aspects need to be considered.

E-mail is one way to keep up and facilitate personal contacts, but it cannot, in all circumstances, replace regional and international workshops and conferences with small- group discussions..

Another problem in using the Internet for studying is that this calls for an enormous expense of time. We know from experience that precious time cannot easily be spared for Internet development, which currently has to be done in addition to day-to-day work. Nevertheless, it is our opinion that active participation in this process is one of the prominent tasks in future for every individual librarian. All of us have or will have to adjust and to organize our work around these new ways of communication because by being personally

,spun in the Web' we will have a better chance of arranging things in our own way, and shaping the means of satisfying our professional requests.

CONCLUSION

The Working Group's Internet platform is an appropriate location on which to focus all kinds of relevant information for map librarianship in an easily accessible central gateway. It certainly offers opportunities to become an ever-growing marketplace for educational information at every level demanded. Active cooperation between specialists and individual initiatives will both have to flourish in order to constantly improve this service and keep it up to date.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

- 1 <<http://www.maps.ethz.ch/gdc-education.html>>.
- 2 <<http://ihr.sas.ac.uk/maps/>>.