

BOOK REVIEW

Resource sharing in libraries; why how, when, next action steps, ed. by Allen Kent. New York, Marcel Dekker, 1974. xi, 393p (Books in library and information science, vol. 8). ISBN 0-8247-6130-8 \$ 24.50. [Reviewed by B Guha]

The volume is an outcome of the papers and discussions of a conference on resource sharing held in April 1973 at Pittsburgh. The conference was jointly sponsored by a number of agencies and was designed for presidents and librarians of institutions of higher education.

The book includes 17 papers grouped under four important aspects of resource sharing viz., the rationale, the mechanics, when to proceed, and how to proceed. The rationale behind the concept of resource sharing and the sense of urgency with which it need be pursued have all been very well presented by the editor in his introduction. It appears, it has become not only prohibitively costly but completely impossible for libraries to be self-sufficient for many other reasons. The solution lies in resource sharing and there is no reasonable alternatives to effective resource sharing.

In the key paper on the rationale, by John Fetterman, it has been clarified that by 'library resource' is meant any and all of the materials, functions, and services which constitute a modern library system. It is the amalgamation of people, processes, ideas, materials and money which form the substance of a library and can be described as its resources. This definition of resource provides the background and the context in which resource sharing has to be considered. The papers in the book together discuss the problems of resource sharing in this vastly extended context of library resource. That there is a need for sharing or library co-operation has been recognised at many quarters. Many governmental and professional commissions in the United States have, on many occasions, indicated this. But there are many barriers, like psychological barriers, lack of information and experience, traditional and historical barriers, physical and geographical barriers, and legal and administrative barriers. This listing

of barriers to cooperation will point out that the people are the more formidable barrier than the technology of sharing. It means we must struggle to "cooperate with each other in spite of our belonging to the human race, which also, is not inclined to be cooperative."

The issues and problems relating to 'how' to share resources have been dealt competently in the key paper by John P Immroth in part two. Different aspects like acquisition, processing, cooperative storage and delivery services have all been discussed in separate papers also. Effective sharing would mean some reorganisation and rethinking in all these aspects. The mechanics of all these have been discussed in detail.

In part three of the book the question 'when to proceed' has been posed. The key paper of this part tackles the question by giving a detailed account of network technology for library resource sharing based on the current state of information systems technology. All the papers in this part together point out to the inevitable conclusion that readily available information storage, information processing, and information transfer technology can support effective library sharing. Hence, the answer to the question when to proceed must be 'now'.

In the last part of the book the theme of the papers is 'how to proceed'. The three papers included here provide a good survey of some of the major cooperative efforts or consortia of libraries in the U.S.A. A number of new consortia have also been proposed.

Although the contents of the book have an American bias, yet it cannot be said that the basic issue of sharing or library cooperation is in any way a problem of a developed and affluent community. The basic issue dealt in the book is as much relevant to a developing country like India as it is to U.S.A. Our librarians are much more harassed by steep budget-cuts, demand for more materials and services, and frustrations. Of course, the sophisticated information systems technology, discussed in the book, will not be available to us. But the message of the book is important for us too and that is, building a dam by way of library resource sharing is the only effective line of defence to withstand the information flood and inflation. This message is not only important for librarians but is equally so for planners and administrators.