

Extending the network: libraries and their partners, 17 au 20 juin
2003 – 32^e congrès LIBER

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materials: the user perspective**

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ROEGIERS, Jan. Integrated resource discovery and access of manuscript materials: the user perspective. In *32nd LIBER Annual General Conference, Extending the network: libraries and their partners, Rome, du 17 au 20 juin 2003* [en ligne]. Format PDF.

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Integrated resource discovery and access of manuscript materials: the user perspective

Jan ROEGIERS

The problems of retrieval and access of manuscript materials differ in many ways from those related to printed material. This is a consequence of the very peculiar nature of the material and also of the expectations of the users, asking questions that differ in many ways from the questions of a common library reader.

The first feature of manuscript material is its absolute lack of uniformity. Each document is unique, a characteristic that constitutes its value, but also complicates its description and retrieval. Another complication stems from the lack of uniformity in the repositories: the allocation of tasks among libraries, archives and even museums is not clear. National traditions in keeping, describing and accessing manuscript material differ more than those related to printed material. The first need of the user is a need for tools that overcome the problems of diversity. Here librarians can learn from archivists.

The user pitches his expectations high concerning the new possibilities for retrieval provided by ICT. In any way he expects more than is already made possible by the, often splendid, available printed tools (catalogues, lists, inventories, guides...). If they don't offer more, the new tools have at least to include the wealth of these older instruments.

Readers can be interested in merely a text, but very often look at other aspects of manuscript material: palaeography, codicology, illumination, provenance... Also for modern manuscripts their questions differ from the approach of printed material and even include curiosity about earlier use of the documents and work in progress. Readers accept easily the use of different tools for retrieval of manuscript and printed material, but at the same time look for common authority files.

Current projects on the national (CGMBPF in France, *Manuscripta Mediaevalia* in Germany, *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta*, NUCMC in the U.S. ...) or European (LEAF, Malvine, MASTER...) level are promising, but offer only partial solutions and are however still in an early stage.