

A Vision for the German Resources Project

Paper presented by Jeffrey Garrett, Northwestern University, Chair, German Resources Project at the GRP Meeting held at the Goethe Forum, Munich, Germany, on July 29, 2003

Good morning everyone.

German is a very subtle language. Not only does it assign grammatical gender to things in a way that has no necessary relationship to real gender, making it possible (in Mark Twain's words) for a turnip (*eine Rübe*) to be more feminine than a beautiful young girl (*ein Mädchen*), which is neuter. No, in German one word can mean one thing but also its opposite. The word *reizen*, for example, can mean to irritate, e.g. in the sentence *reiz mich nicht!*, but also to attract strongly, as in *das reizt mich ungemein*. The verb *aufheben* can mean to annul or to abolish, but also to take good care of, to save for later use, for example: *Bei mir ist dein Geld gut aufgehoben*. Which brings us to the word *Vision*, which in German can either refer to an ability to look ahead, synonymous to *Weitblick haben*, or it can mean to have delusions, to see things that aren't there. In German, to be a *Visionär* is good, to have *Visionen*, on the other hand, can make you a crackpot.

In what follows, I want to tread the narrow path between having vision and having visions, between looking ahead with imagination and looking ahead and being deluded. It's what we call in American English "the vision thing," something George Bush, Sr. supposedly had too little of and what his son, our president today, may be taking by contrast to new delusional extremes.

The German Resources Project is now five years old—ten years if we add the lifespan of its predecessor organization, the German Demonstration Project. There is no doubt that we live in a very different world in 2003 than we did in 1993—or even in 1998. On the one hand, the Internet and the revolution in display technologies have breathtakingly realized the promise of the *copy*, that remarkable human invention that dates to the origins of scribal culture. With every copy made, information and ideas become available simultaneously in two or hundreds or, now, infinitely many mutually distant places. Both time and space have been conquered by the perfection of the copy and its delivery—and by the library as the aggregation point, real and potential, of thousands and millions of copies. Computer technology is now completing a complementary heuristic revolution: we can increasingly locate what we need based on a minimum of locating information—this is the principle of Google, the user-centric searching tool gradually also finding acceptance in research library environments. These two technological revolutions conjoined—the revolutions of the *copy* and of the

query—mean both that everything is at hand and that we can find everything we can minimally describe. Google *can* locate the needle in the haystack, provided we input either the words “needle” and “haystack,” or at the very least the anded words “metal” and “sharp.” Google is the ultimate vindication of the German library theoretician Martin Schrettinger’s belief that *catalog conquers glut*. And so we can have it all, both the universe—the glut—and pinpointed document retrieval.

What are the practical consequences of this revolution? I plan to deal with this subject in greater depth in my paper at tomorrow’s IFLA preconference, but in the context of the German Resources Project and its future, let’s now just consider one consequence that has completely changed what our organization is about. It has to do with the library’s obligation to keep what it has for future generations. In the case of almost all scientific information out there, this obligation no longer devolves upon individual institutions. The obligation to conserve the 10,000th or even the 50th copy of a monograph or a serials run in paper form is based on a now disappearing library landscape in which individual libraries had to be prepared to sustain themselves. Although this can still be done today, at great cost, we are increasingly realizing that we will all sink or swim together. This affects the importance accruing to autarky in the modern, 21st century library environment, both at the institutional and the national levels.

“Autarky” is actually a Greek word that German has retained, but is rarely used in English. It means, in a word, self-sufficiency. The German Resources Project wanted autarky for North America with regard to German resources. But autarky has already not made sense for many years. Today, the total bibliographic transparency that we enjoy to the collections of our neighbors in North America and in Germany had made it far less important to anticipate every user need on our own library shelves, real or virtual. It makes less of a difference today, at least beyond that core collection of materials that we *must* have on hand, what we have on our shelves and what we lack. We can almost always get it quickly from somewhere else. This means, at least in theory, that we can outsource the collection of more esoteric German resources to Germany, where specially identified institutions, the so-called *Sondersammelgebietenbibliotheken* supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, are already focusing funds and expertise on creating collections of distinction across the disciplinary spectrum.

The original purpose of the GRP was to serve as a vehicle for cooperative and collaborative collection development efforts within the United States and Canada, essentially to ensure that North American research libraries had comprehensive, minimally redundant collections of materials for the study of German society and culture available to their researchers and students—in effect trying to recreate the library of materials at the disposal of researchers in Germany. This time-honored model did not, however, take several important factors into account. Let me mention several:

- In the new electronic environment, we do not need to duplicate German research library collections in order to be able to have access to them—access defined here both as *bibliographic access*, i.e. we know what they have over there because we have direct real-time access to their catalogs, and *access to content*, because increasingly this content is available electronically. And you cannot duplicate something, at least not for any rational purpose, that is already ubiquitous—you can only provide access to it.
- The presumption of the old model was that German research materials are of interest to us only inasmuch as they help us understand German society, culture, science, industry, and so on. This represents a totally unnecessary form of tunnel vision, especially when one considers the extraordinary wealth of research that takes place in Germany on all topics of interest, for example, the ancient Near East, the history of music, or even American studies.

No, what needs to be done in the context of a “German Resources Project” that is worthy of the new age is to look at German libraries not as quarries to be mined or duplicated on our shores, but as partners, and German resources as potentially deliverable to the desktop, or physically deliverable, aided by Internet-supported search and discovery, this as a product of collaboration with German content providers, both academic and commercial.

A final point before becoming concrete about the GRP as a transatlantic consortium in the age of the Internet: Every partnership requires reciprocity to be viable over time, and for this reason the flow of information and services facilitated by the German Resources Project has to be in both directions. We need to help our European partners in ways that mirror the way we are asking them to help us.

I want to now describe several recent initiatives of the German Resources Project, specifically to highlight what characterizes the new research network, built on the gains of the electronic revolutions described earlier. The first involves the creation of a basic German-language reference collection in American research libraries. The old method would have been to consult respected booklists such as the *Guide to Reference Books* or, for smaller collections, *Books for College Libraries*, and then urge individual libraries to go out and buy them. In the new environment, there are other ways to proceed, since reference books in Europe, too, are increasingly online. During the summer of 2000, our colleague Jim Campbell of the University of Virginia drew our attention to a free trial of *Kindlers Literaturlexikon* online. Turns out that the provider of this online service, xipolis.net of Munich, also owned rights to other major reference sources, from publishers such as Brockhaus, Duden, Metzler, and Spektrum. An extended trial was negotiated for early 2001 and succeeded thanks to the enthusiastic support of many colleagues in the Collection Development Working Group of the German

Resources Project. The real trials began, though, when lawyers from our parent entity ARL negotiated price and access terms with the database provider in Munich. These trials, too, ultimately ended successfully, and the switch was thrown for the first twelve participants in the xipolis program in March 2002. Today, about 30 GRP members participate. No paper, no muss, no fuss.

Where it is not possible to get primary content in digital form as we succeeded in doing with xipolis, at the very least we should strive for convenient electronic access to bibliographic information. This may seem obvious and even unnecessary in the age of the OPAC and WorldCat, but the fact is that enormous collections of microfilm are bibliographically accessible often only through print finding aids. In German studies, online records exist for several large collections, e.g. the Baroque collections owned by Duke and Yale. But one very large recent project, the Library of German Literature (*Bibliothek der deutschen Literatur*) encompassing 15,000 items on 19,000 fiches, published by K.G. Saur and completed in the 1990s, until recently at least still covered in bibliographic darkness. Well, not entirely, since there were records for all of these in Germany, and in USMARC at that, but compliant with RAK, the German cataloging standard, rather than AACR2. This made them unusable for US research libraries: Authority records in Germany, for example, in no way match our own, and a huge divide separates us in the assignment of subject headings as well. And all that German metalanguage would have to go, too.

The only hope to bring these records over the pond lay in developing automatic procedures for converting most of the information, doing authority work manually—and ignoring subject headings altogether. And, of course, in finding a cataloger or catalogers who could do this. Given the size of the record set, it would only succeed as a conversion project with a minimum of manual intervention.

Eight GRP member institutions undertook the job on behalf of their co-members: Chicago, Harvard, Illinois, Indiana, Northwestern, Penn, UCLA and Wisconsin. Each project partner contributed \$750 to pay for cataloger overtime. The originally projected 100 hours—for 15,000 records that would have meant lightning speed—ballooned to over 200, but ultimately the job was completed in the summer of 2002. (And at a clip of 75 converted records per hour, no one could accuse the project catalogers of being slouches, either!) OCLC was delighted with the results, regarding the records as original cataloging (although the “original” work had been done at the Deutsche Bibliothek in Frankfurt), which entitled us to approximately \$60,000 in credits. We instead requested \$20,000, but in cash—and OCLC agreed. After compensating the catalogers and Die Deutsche Bibliothek, we were able to turn over \$11,000 to the German Resources Project—a very important infusion of funds, because at least until this spring, the GRP has had no authority to collect dues from members, meaning that everything we do operates on the basis of volunteer work by GRP librarians. The point to make is that as a result of this project, at least eight libraries have

these records in their OPACs, OCLC has them for many others—and, incidentally, over 1000 German writers have been added to the national name authority file.

But looking ahead, this same approach could be used to make many other valuable German collections bibliographically accessible to the North American research community—and, if OCLC is willing to partner with us again, this could also mean important revenue for the Project. One such worthwhile enterprise could be to provide AACR2-compliant cataloging for the collection of biographical works indexed in K.G. Saur's *Internationaler Biographischer Index*. The 3.5 million entries in this index point to biographical articles in close to 10,000 works. Owners of the microfiche archives could benefit enormously from having title-level access to the biographical works contained in this huge set, which are currently accessible only through print finding aids—or by locating references based on a search of the online index hosted at the University Library of Braunschweig.¹ Die Deutsche Bibliothek—we were told during our visit to Saur headquarters yesterday—is now at work cataloging the biographical works in this collection, and these records can reference both the microfiche that many North American libraries already own and the forthcoming electronic versions of these works, accessible via the Internet. The German Resources Project, which worked so successfully with K.G. Saur and the German National Library on the *Bibliothek der Deutschen Literatur* project, needs to leverage these good working relations and gear up for the “next big thing.” Other projects which could benefit from this type of cooperation include several microform sets published by Belser Wissenschaftlicher Dienst. Electronic records for the Edition Corvey and the Bibliothek Stein are already available, for example, on the site of Die Deutsche Bibliothek in Frankfurt², and only need to be converted to conform to US standards.

A third area ripe for new consortial cooperation which I want to treat here involves the revolutionary departure from the notion of “German resources” being necessarily culture- or language-delimited—and parallel to this, the notion of a “German Resources Project” as necessarily being a one-way street. At the last meeting of the German Resources Project to take place on German soil—in March 1999 in Göttingen—Tom Kilton and I hatched the plan to create a system of subject-based “contact partnerships” between colleagues at institutions in Germany and North America to facilitate the flow of collections-related information in both directions across the Atlantic. It made sense, for example, to pair subject specialists in Judaica from Harvard and Frankfurt and in religion from Duke and Tübingen. Such partnerships would leverage both individual expertise and exceptionally strong collections, we felt. Just such a framework was created during 2000 and 2001, complete with an online discussion group hosted by the Association of Research Libraries in Washington, D.C. Build it and they will come: that was our motto. And indeed, several things did happen. Contact

¹ http://www.biblio.tu-bs.de/wbi12_en/

² http://www.ddb.de/produkte/maschinenlesb_dienste.htm

partners in Middle Eastern Studies, Business and Economics, and Judaica actually met together and discussed improving cooperation, including enhancing transatlantic awareness of the riches available in each other's libraries.

But by and large, the contact partnerships have to date not been successful. We believe that we are now running up against the limits of a system based on the willingness of individuals to mount and sustain initiatives within a collective framework. As we look ahead, we are envisioning the creation of a better communications infrastructure, including a newsletter for the exchange of meeting reports and other useful information. We also need to stimulate face-to-face meetings within the contact partner framework, and the partner presentations at this meeting today, involving paired German-American presentations in Middle Eastern Studies (Yale and Halle) and in Art History (Northwestern and Heidelberg), have been put on the agenda to anticipate a future of more active exchange.

The three projects described have been presented here in light of their future potential, their lessons as we shape future action. Other future developments involve entirely new opportunities. In searching for areas of cooperation, we need to keep an open mind and be prepared to think opportunistically—in other words *not* just in terms of what has worked before, as valuable as these lessons may be.

Let me offer an example of something entirely different, crossing the boundaries between the purviews of our working groups for digital libraries and bibliographical access and control:

In spring of last year, my university was contacted by colleagues at the University of Stuttgart Library and the Bibliotheksservice-Zentrum Baden-Württemberg with an interesting idea. These institutions were planning to begin scanning table of contents (TOC) information from German monographs, and wondered if we wouldn't like to partner with them on a grant proposal to NSF and DFG. Our job would be to find a way to include German TOC information in records in USMARC, AACR2 compliant, and then see if these records couldn't be made available more broadly, either through OCLC, through the GRP, or through a combination of both. We did join up with them to submit a grant proposal, but as we heard several months ago, it was declined. This does not, to my mind, make the idea any less interesting. Imagine how useful it could be to have information in our OPACs on articles that Jürgen Habermas or Marcel Reich-Ranicki have contributed to anthologies or festschriften, keeping in mind that Blackwells only does English-language tables of contents. Couldn't this be a project for one of our working groups, or two of them working together and collaborating with our German colleagues in Stuttgart and Konstanz? Many of the principals from these groups are here with us today—perhaps they will find a chance to talk?

Looking now beyond particular projects, we need to be considering new institutional alliances. We are very excited by the prospects and the potential for closer collaboration with the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago. To pick up the line of argument begun just a moment ago: Up until now, we have been running an institutional consortium through the initiative of—but also on the backs of—individual librarians. This approach has been both the strength and the weakness of our organization. Undeniably, we have been great at generating ideas and seeing many of them through to successful conclusions. Individuals are excellent project conceivers and project managers, but sustaining the day-to-day, week-to-week, and year-to-year hum of an organization is not what individuals excel at. We need infrastructure. The Association of Research Libraries has been and will remain a key partner for us, especially as a means to communicate our goals to ARL libraries and library directors, but ARL has made it clear that their logistical support of our efforts has its limits. By teaming with the Center for Research Libraries, which already successfully hosts a number of international projects, we will be crafting an infrastructural and logistical partnership that will complement our ties to ARL. We need a business address, we need business management, website hosting, listserv moderation, a newsletter, and we also could benefit enormously from closer ties with an institution that is a library of valuable materials in its own right and that has, further, an internationally expansive agenda. The partnership with CRL could make us an even more attractive partner for the German side, principally the large libraries in Göttingen and Munich who have shown the greatest interest in and support of our efforts, but who are looking for services that will reciprocate the services that we are asking of them.

Later today, you will be hearing from Melissa Trevvett of the Center for Research Libraries. She will tell you about the great strengths and also the physical assets of the Center. We hope to explore with all of you, our American and German partners alike, what new synergies can be created that will drive the German Resources Project forward as a transatlantic consortium, benefiting both sides.

We have a full agenda for this meeting—thanks to the extraordinary organizational efforts of Helene Baumann aided by the indomitable Klaus Kempf—so I should probably try to come to a close. We are here today with all four working groups, represented by their chairs: Jim Niessen of Rutgers for the Collection Development Working Group; Lynn Wiley of Illinois for the Document Delivery WG; Dick Hacken of Brigham Young University for the Digital Libraries WG; and Roger Brisson of Harvard for the Bibliographic Control and Access WG. They and their immediate predecessors—Barbara Walden (Wisconsin) for Collection Development and Michael Seadle (Michigan State) for Digital Libraries—all have great ideas in mind for future projects as well as major accomplishments to their credit. But they need your help. Every working group is subject to the same need for constant reexamination of goals in a constantly changing environment. Last year's plan may no longer make sense in light of this year's realities! Does transatlantic document delivery make sense anymore in

light of publisher restrictions across borders? Is the transoceanic shipment of "returnables," as I believe actual books are called in the trade, necessary if entire chapters or even entire books can be digitized and transmitted on the fly? Has the work of the Digital Libraries Working Group been made obsolete by other avenues of communication and cooperation, e.g. the NSF working directly together with the DFG? Where are the new openings, the new needs? What successes of the past can be replicated by finding similar opportunities? How can the new partnership with CRL be developed and exploited to everyone's advantage? How can we make more active participation of the German side more attractive to our German partners?

The biggest barrier that we believe is blocking greater cooperation in this new transatlantic consortium is neither time nor space nor even money. It is mental. It is the still persistent belief that what divides us is greater than what could and should be bringing us together, namely the promise of shared resources, of shared expertise, of a new whole greater than the sum of the constituent parts—of a shared future.

Thank you for your attention. I wish us now all a productive and successful meeting.