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Book Review

Helga Lengenfelder, Gertrud Conrad-Bergweiler, Barbara Fischer and Angelika Riedel, eds., *Libraries, Information Centers and Databases in Science and Technology: a World Guide*, 1st edition. München: K.G. Saur, 1984. xxv + 561 p. DM240 / £65 / US$100. Hard cover. ISBN 3-598-10533-9, ISSN 0176-7593.

If you have to find out the library's telephone number at the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics at Garching in Upper Bavaria, or need the exact address of the Brazilian National Documentary Information Center for Agriculture, or maybe would like to know which online services they are using at the US Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine, then this directory should come in quite handy. Who is the head of technical information for the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute? How long ago was the Swedish Royal Institute of Technology Library established? How many volumes are in the collection of the Royal Society's library in London? What is the size of the government documents collection at Cornell University's Engineering Library? How many current periodical subscriptions does the Indian National Information Center for Food Science and Technology maintain? Can you borrow books on interlibrary loan from the Bell Canada Information Resource Centre in Montréal? All of that information is easily located in this volume—along with a great deal more of the same sort, including such curiosa as the fact that there are 1,000 manuscripts (nature unspecified) housed at the Soviet All-Union Research Institute of the Salt Industry in Artemovsk, and that the Indonesian Sugar Research Institute library owns two 16/35 mm films.

But let us say that you wanted such information for example for the Radcliffe Science Library in Oxford, or the National Translation Center in Chicago, the Queensland Institute of Technology Library in Australia, the CID-TNO in Delft or the British Museum Natural History library in London. In these cases, the book would be of no use to you—since those are among the many institutions conspicuous by their absence. It would be easy to cite many other (in some instances equally or even more striking) omissions—omissions for which there is no obvious rationale. You will find an entry for the Saskatchewan Technical Institute Library in Moose Jaw, but no mention of, for example, the library of Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ. The Central Reference and Research Library of the Ghanaian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research is here, while the Science Reference Library in London is not. There are 1,397 entries for the USSR, but the All-Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information (VINITI) is not among them.

It is therefore necessary to conclude that, while this directory offers a wealth of information on S&T libraries and information centers—approximately 10,900 of them in 139 countries—it must not be considered a comprehensive (or probably even genuinely representative) guide. If, aside from the kind of clearly random oversights cited above, there is any pattern of deficiency it is 1) that coverage of industrial and corporate research information units is notably sparse—especially outside the FRG and North America—and 2) that some of the smaller nations are in general poorly represented (e.g. only two entries for Saudi Arabia, two for North Korea, three for Burma, twelve for Greece). It is important also to notice how the publisher has defined the scope of "science and technology". Medicine, for instance, is expressly excluded; but included are such fields as 'managerial services', 'catering and hotel management' and 'home economics'.

According to its title, this publication is also intended to serve as a guide to S&T data bases (variously called "data banks"), of which it includes approximately 350. Even aside from the very considerable difficulties of access to the pertinent entries (see below), the volume however does not deserve to be highly recommended as a reference source for data-base information. One reason is that it provides only a few details for each file. Another is the obvious problem of out-of-datedness: the online data-base situation is evolving and changing so rapidly (new offerings, expansions to coverage, cancellation of files, withdrawal of a file from a given host computer, mounting of a file on a new host [and now 'gateway' arrangements], etc.) that the information printed here was to a considerable extent already obsolete by the time of publication. Thirdly, as in the case of libraries and information centers, so in the case of data bases one notes numerous significant oversights. Let me only name a few of the omissions which I happened to notice—and it will be more than apparent what is the extent of the problem in this regard: NASA, Compendex, JICST, BIOSIS, SciSearch and NTIS. It is true that you will find here some (mostly fairly obscure) files which are missed out in the better known directories (such as those of Williams and Cuadra), but such inclusions do not diminish the fact that those publications are for most purposes far better sources for data on data bases.

Pages 3–330 of this guide contain the actual listings/descriptions, ordered by country—from Afganistan through Zimbabwe (alphabetized on the common Anglophone versions, which are the only ones given). For each country, organizations—libraries, information and documentation centers, data-base producers—are listed in alphabetical order by full name (either of the organization itself or of the parent body). There are no *see* or *see also* references (e.g. from COSTI [the normal designation] to National Center of Scientific and Technological Information, from National Marine Fisheries Service to US Department of Commerce [where one of the NMFS libraries is listed]). Each entry for a library or information/documentation center contains all or some of the following: name (sometimes together with that of the parent body or authority), address, telephone and telex numbers, cable address, year of foundation, name of head (and/or contact person), principal areas of interest, special departments, extent of holdings (number of volumes, number of current periodical subscriptions,

number of microforms, maps, technical reports, sound recordings, incunabula, patents etc.), external online services used (including bibliographic utilities and special networks), whether its material is available for interlending, and to what professional associations, cooperatives etc. the institution and its staff belong. (I have used the phrase "all or some". In many instances the lack of specifics seems odd: though it is an important institution, for example, the Scientific and Technical Library of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Shanghai is listed without address, telephone, telex or cable information; for many libraries there is no indication of main fields of interest; quite often there are no specifics on holdings etc.) For each data-base producer we find: name and contact information (and occasionally membership information—though that is very often overlooked), followed by the names and brief descriptions of the files which it produces, and the host systems on which these files are accessible. To each record is attached a unique running number, for indexing purposes. (In the case of data-base producers, each entry comprises at least two numbered records—one for the producer and one for each of his data bases.)

Perhaps I may be allowed a remark concerning the arrangement adopted for the guide. For some countries (e.g. China, the Arabic countries), the organizations are entered under English (or in some cases French) translations of their names, and with no indication of the local-language version; for other countries (e.g. Japan, the USSR), entries are by roman transliteration of the actual name, with parenthetical English translation; and for the remaining countries, it is the original versions which have been taken for headings (either accompanied by English translation – e.g. from the Turkish, the Romanian, the Hungarian; or without it – as in the cases of all western European languages). In the latter two classes, while it is indeed often useful to have the original name (which otherwise may be difficult to locate), finding the organization in question can become correspondingly more difficult: if you are looking for the Finnish State Computer Center, for example, it may take you some time before you spot it—under Valtion tietokonekeskuksen kirjasto; and you will have similar problems should you need to find the Transport Information Center in Prague unless you happen to be aware that its proper designation is Odvětvové informační středisko dopravy; or let's say you want to locate the Dutch Patent Office without knowing that the proper terminology is Octrooiraad. After you have made it beyond the headings, you may well be relieved to discover that all the further information is in English—except for Austria, Switzerland, the GDR and the FRG: here the descriptions of collections and of data bases are for the most part in German.

About 95% of the entries (and more than 90% of the records) in this guide derive from what the publisher calls his "database of special libraries" (which he used to produce his *World Guide to Special Libraries* published in 1983). These and the supplementary entries—i.e. for information/documentation centers and for data-base producers—were updated selectively by means of questionnaires. The editorial deadline was 20 July 1984, and publication followed toward the end of the year.

The volume contains three "indices". The first of these (p. 333–411) is simply a

single alphabetical sequence of the headings (organizational names, without translations) from the main listing, plus the city of location; the second (p. 413–414) is a register of "data banks" (in alphabetical order, and in most cases only the acronyms); the third (p. 415–561) is a subject index. The first of these indexes serves virtually no purpose; it would only be useful if you are looking for an organization whose name you know (and furthermore in the exact form chosen by the editors), while not knowing the country in which it is situated. The subject index could prove more serviceable—depending on the circumstances involved. Let's say that you are interested in salt. That word in fact appears as an index term, and under it you will find eight references—for libraries in Austria, India, Portugal, and the USSR (a library in Leningrad; the one in Artemovsk mentioned above is inexplicably missing in the index), for three libraries in Japan, as well as for a marine technology bibliographic data base produced in Hannover and available on three German hosts. In general, the level of subject access is not terribly deep. Many potential terms are not to be found, while sometimes you will be confronted by several pages of references (organizational names, in alphabetical order) under a single term (e.g. more than six pages for "Engineering"). Some cross references do occur—such as "Climatology *see Meteorology, Climatology*", though not of the variety "Atomic energy *see Nuclear energy*"—but these are in any event not very frequent. Locating a known entity via the subject index can also prove a considerable task. If we return to the example of the Finnish State Computer Center, it turns out that using the subject index is even less productive than consulting the main listing under Finland: after skimming more than 400 references under "Computer and Information Science, Data Processing", the item "Valtion tietokonekeskuksen kirjasto, Espoo – 02154" may still ring no bell at all.

But what about finding data-base information by subject? In some cases it is easy. If your subject is packaging, for instance, you will note a manageable seventeen references under this term in the index—of which four are soon revealed as dealing with online files (Paperchem, FSTA, PSTA and PIRA). Suppose however that you would like to know whether there exists a data base dealing specifically with agricultural research in progress. To my knowledge, there are at least eight such files available. Six of these, including the best known and most widely accessible of them (AGREP, CRIS, CARIS) do not occur in this directory. Of the remaining two, one is called FOHA 80/FOHAALT, and a description of it is buried on page 123, under "Germany, Federal Republic – Zentralstelle für Agrardokumentation und -information". In order to locate this item through the subject index, one must look under "Agriculture, Agronomy", and go through twenty-three columns of references (well over one thousand of them) before encountering "Zentralstelle ..., FOHA 80/FOHAALT, Bonn – 04214", which is of course not necessarily recognizable as a reference to a data base. Using the (alphabetical) data bank index would not have been much more effective, since that list indicates neither the full name of the file nor the subject with which it deals. (The other pertinent data base covered here is probably more quickly located; a reference to the entry appears under the same subject index

term as "Canadian Agricultural Council, ICAR, Ottawa – 01252".) This example is entirely characteristic of the sort of obstacles awaiting anyone who tries to use this guide as a tool for locating data-base information, particularly in terms of subject access. This in addition to the fact that not all data bases occurring in the guide are indexed by subject (e.g. EABS, WTI), the lack of any access by data-base distributor, and the general problems of data-base coverage already mentioned above.

The book also contains a List of Professional Associations (poorly edited: e.g. ASIDIC is given as ASIDIS; the full names of EUSIDIC and ASIS are stated incorrectly; ACRL and RTSD are not identified as divisions of ALA; many associations—e.g. AIM, ARMA, ICSU AB (ICSTI), IEEE—don't appear here though they occur in the organizational listings), a register of abbreviations, and eleven pages of space advertisements. The Preface and Suggestions for Use (as well as the book's title and some rubrics) are bilingual English/German.

The printing, paper and binding are of high quality—up to the usual standards of this publisher.

Libraries, Information Centers and Databases in Science and Technology probably deserves a place on the reference shelves of all major S&T publishers, book wholesalers, subscription agents, and large retail booksellers. For these companies it can be a useful working tool. The same might also hold true of data-base producers and online service providers. Large public and academic libraries could likewise justify its purchase for their own reference collections. The publisher of this guide states that he intends to issue a new edition "about every two years". A few simple modifications would greatly improve its usefulness. One of these would be to employ a classified arrangement of entries under each country. Another would be to create a separate subject index for online data bases. These two modifications alone would ameliorate many of the difficulties which I have pointed out above, and should not be very irksome or expensive to execute, at least from a technical point of view.

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