



Iowa Research Online  
The University of Iowa's Institutional Repository

---

University of Iowa Libraries Staff Publications

---

4-1-1993

## Access and ownership: Philosophical sea-change or political rhetoric

Edward Shreeves  
*University of Iowa*

---

Copyright © 1993 Edward Shreeves

### Comments

Talk given at the Center for Research Libraries Annual Meeting, April, 1993

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](http://Iowa Research Online). For more information please contact: [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

**Access and ownership:**  
**Philosophical sea-change or political rhetoric**  
*Talk, Center for Research Libraries Annual Meeting*  
(April, 1993)

The phrase “access over ownership” and its variants had achieved by the early 1990’s an almost mantra-like currency among librarians from all types of libraries. Its widespread use, however, reflects more than just the rhetorical effectiveness of an oversimplified concept. Increasing pressures on the budgets of all libraries, including research libraries, together with improved means of communication and delivery have forced libraries to make a virtue of necessity and pay increasing attention to resource sharing as an important element in the package of services offered to users.

Most would define the “resources” of resource sharing to be the information resources typically collected by libraries and made available under certain conditions to users not traditionally a part of the owning library’s clientele. Later discussion will suggest that the concept of the resources to be shared in the new electronic environment needs to be broadened to include human and computer resources among others. In traditional terms, however, resource sharing focused on three functions or tasks: (1) bibliographic access--that is, knowledge of what is available for sharing from other sites by such means as union lists or bibliographic utilities like OCLC; (2) a system for making requests and providing delivery of information, chiefly through the interlibrary loan process; and (3) cooperative collection development, which sought to ensure that libraries built complementary collections of resources on which to draw. The only essential component of resource sharing is the second, a protocol for making requests and acceptable methods of delivery. Convenience and political considerations have caused most resource sharing to occur within the confines of a consortium or federation of libraries, though a consortial relationship is not absolutely necessary to cooperation at its most basic level.

Developments over the past twenty years have revolutionized libraries’ ability to provide bibliographic access, though these developments did not arise primarily to serve the needs of resource sharing. Developments occurring over the past five or ten years promise to alter fundamentally the nature of interlibrary loan operations. Only in the third area, cooperative building of collections, has major change been slow to come. Yet, as many have pointed out, offering access as a stand-in for ownership works only when another library has chosen ownership over access, and is willing to share the wealth (Branin, 82). The following paragraphs will summarize some of the familiar changes in the ways bibliographic access is provided, along with the changes being experienced on the delivery side of resource sharing, but will take for its primary focus cooperative collection development.

A number of significant advances based on machine-readable cataloging have had the incidental effect of dramatically improving access to bibliographic information for

resource sharing. The rise in the 1970's of bibliographic utilities like OCLC and RLIN and their universal use by larger libraries provided *de facto* union catalogs for purposes of identifying at the title level materials held elsewhere. In the 1980's many libraries began to implement integrated library systems locally, including on-line public catalogs and acquisitions and serials subsystems. In some ways, this development represented a step backward for resource sharing, since the OPAC allowed libraries to make records for certain materials available to users without requiring them to be made available to other libraries on national utilities. The explosion in the use of computer networks in the mid- to late 1980's compensated somewhat for this regression by making it possible for the persistent to search the catalogs of other libraries. The steady progress of retrospective conversion in the 1980's and 1990's also bolstered resource sharing efforts, as more and more locations for older materials became findable by on-line searching. Finally, the increased acceptance and implementation of standards such as Z39.50 began to make it easier to search the catalogs of other libraries.

Technology has also had its effect on the provision of documents via interlibrary loan. Taking advantage of every advance from the photocopy machine to the latest scanning devices, interlibrary loan departments have tried to keep up with sharply increasing demands. The 1993/94 *Association of Research Library Statistics* (p. 8-9) show an increase in borrowing by ARL libraries of 99%, and an increase in lending of 50% in the years between 1986 and 1994. Most of those writing about resource sharing and cooperative collection development have recognized the absolute centrality of effective delivery to the success of cooperative efforts (Mosher and Pankake, 426). For remote access to substitute for local ownership, a library must minimize the time between identification of a needed resource and its provision. While no one expects the time lag for remote resources to approach that offered by locally held materials (when those materials are on the shelf), there is general agreement that the average time of delivery must be reduced from its current average of xx days. Projects such as the North American Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery Project, sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries, are seeking ways to streamline and improve the quality and speed of interlibrary lending (Cite URL). Some aspects of this effort are directed to the internal management of the interlibrary loan system and need not be reviewed here. Nevertheless, several new directions do deserve mention. Most important perhaps is the move to allow for direct and unmediated patron-initiated requests for materials. Enabled by the technologies of the Internet, by standards like Z39.50 and Z39.63, and by more and more user-friendly interfaces, patron-initiated ILL could potentially increase the usage of distant resources substantially. It also raises a host of policy issues for libraries and consortia seeking to implement it. For example, which classes of users are allowed access to direct borrowing? Should a loan in this environment be governed by circulation policies or by interlibrary loan protocols? If by circulation policies, whose, the borrowing or lending library's? Should borrowing of locally held material be allowed? Should there be limits on borrowing by individual patrons, to discourage abuse? Is the loan made to the borrowing library, as in the ILL model, or to the patron? If to the patron, who assumes responsibility for ensuring return?

Recent studies have also brought attention to the real costs of interlibrary loan transactions, and led to renewed efforts to improve efficiency and effectiveness. [Cite ARL/RLG study] Greater use of faster methods of delivery have cut the time spent by “returnables” in transit, while such systems as ARIEL have helped improve the quality of transmitted images, as well as allowing for delivery to the user’s desktop of scanned images. All of these steps, both actual and prospective, have led to incremental improvement in the delivery component of resource sharing, but it is fair to say these improvements have not yet convinced most users that remote are the near-equivalent to local resources. The growing utilization of commercial document suppliers has also enlarged the range of delivery options available. At the same time they have heightened awareness of the value which users attach to rapid delivery, and put pressure on ILL units to match their speed.

Resource sharing among research libraries, and between research libraries and libraries with less extensive collections, has long occurred--and will continue to occur--no matter what takes place in the realm of cooperative collection development. There is little evidence to date that cooperative efforts aimed at acquisitions have had more than a modest effect on other aspects of resource sharing. There is, however, widespread belief that cooperation in building collections can significantly improve the quality of library service by broadening and deepening the range of materials collectively available. If libraries--so the argument goes--can increase that portion of the information universe maintained within the national (or state or regional) collection through a planned and conscious division of labor, users will have access to more than they would have if that collection had been developed purely in response to local imperatives. In the paragraphs that follow, I will examine some of the fundamental assumptions related to cooperative collection development and resource sharing, and speculate about the future directions that cooperation relating to information resources might take. The uncertainty of the future shape of the scholarly information universe makes such speculation more than a little risky. Nevertheless some vaguely outlined shapes seem to be emerging from the mist. The stakes for the constituencies that research libraries serve (and therefore for libraries themselves) are high enough that librarians and scholars must examine the implications of future scenarios carefully, and marshal their efforts to meet the most important and realistic goals.

The purpose of cooperation among libraries has been summarized as providing “better, faster, easier access to more”. (Allen, LAPAT p. 158) Cooperative collection development has to do only with the “more” of this definition. The improvements sketched above relating to bibliographic access and delivery are chiefly concerned with “better, faster, easier.” A standard vision of cooperative collection development in the print environment divides the information universe into “core” and “peripheral” materials. A research library has responsibility to maintain on-site a “core,” collection that serves immediate needs, especially those of undergraduates, and to develop research collections of “peripheral” research information in selected areas that respond to local priorities but also serve consortial needs. This collection, in turn, is backed up by the collections of consortial partners built through distributed responsibility for peripheral

materials in complementary fields. Defining what “core” and “peripheral” really meant has always been one of the stumbling blocks to successful cooperative projects. In general, materials on the periphery were considered to be research materials (of the sort that might form part of an RLG level 4--or perhaps level 3--collection) unlikely to be in heavy demand by any member of the consortium. Described from another perspective, the body of material to be shared would come from that 80% of the collection which received 20% of the use (Branin, ).

An argument could be made that cooperative collection development is now and always has been a marginally important component of resource sharing, not a mandatory prerequisite. The grounds for this argument would be different now from what they were twenty or thirty years ago. In the 1960's and 1970's collection budgets at many research libraries were strong enough to build deep collections in many subject areas. While no one could supply locally everything called for by those conducting research, the different emphases in universities around the country, supported by relatively generous resources, resulted in naturally diverse collections. Overlap was considerable, to be sure, but many libraries were able to acquire substantial amounts of unique or rarely held material as well. This description corresponds roughly to the model described by Mosher and Pankake as the status quo approach: “This approach presumes that the total collecting activity of ARL and other major research libraries achieves, on a national scale, reasonable depth in every area of interest to research in the United States, both in the present and in the future. It is the total of the collections of research libraries which approaches comprehensiveness.” (Mosher and Pankake, p. 424). The means for discovering what was held elsewhere were primitive by present standards, but, through the happenstance of differing programmatic focus and selectors with deep pockets, the range of resources acquired and held was collectively broad.

Today, there is growing evidence that the range of resources is becoming narrower, and collections are becoming more homogeneous. The indications for this are most clear-cut in the journal literature of the sciences, medicine and technology, and in material published outside the US in the humanities and social sciences. (cite Perrault & Schmidt and Chrsz). Meanwhile, as summarized above, the infrastructure supporting resource sharing has grown much more robust. Yet, despite a much higher profile for many aspects of resource sharing, cooperative efforts in building collections have still been limited in their impact. It could be argued that the relative lack of success is not an unmitigated tragedy, that perhaps cooperative collection development efforts have not achieved more because they have so far commanded only a limited amount of time and energy. This outcome could be seen as desirable, not because the rich tapestry of strong collections rendered massive effort unnecessary, as before, but because the time and energy such efforts would require of collection development and other library staff are more urgently needed elsewhere.

In reviewing the literature related to cooperative collection development, two noteworthy themes emerge. First, there is remarkably widespread agreement about many of the factors which lead to success. Second, there is a grudging admission that “only modest

successes can be identified” (Branin, p. 87) among the many cooperative collection development efforts that have been underway over the past half century. These somewhat contradictory ideas raise some questions. How reliable are the success factors identified, if successes to date have been only modest? Are they so rarely found together in sufficient strength and quantity that most efforts are doomed to failure? Or is there a missing, critical factor--yet to be clearly identified--which would serve as a catalyst to enable the rest lead to substantive achievement? Or do verdicts of limited success underestimate the long-range effects of cooperative collection development work in the late twentieth century? Would the research collections which now serve the nation collectively have been much less diverse than they in fact are had it not been for the dozens of “modestly successful” efforts around the country? Finally, how will librarians and scholars know if they achieve success? How is success in cooperative building of collections to be measured?

It has been suggested that there is a degree of hypocrisy in the nominal support given to cooperative collection development (Atkinson, 30). Everyone from the President or Provost to the individual bibliographer pays lip service to its importance and value, but no one expects or wants cooperative activity to have much more than a minimal effect. What is important is the appearance of effort. Atkinson (p. 29) points to this argument as “cynical and mostly wrong” but containing “some elements of truth.” He suggests that librarians do not want to succeed in cooperation because to do so would result in loss of budget. The faculty do not want such efforts to succeed because the current system creates artificial markets for specialized journals in which they can publish and build their reputations. The University, dependent on the faculty for its competitive reputation, connives in the charade.

One way to measure the truth of this assertion would be to examine the extent to which rewards for selectors and collection administrators are based on their contributions to cooperative efforts. Of course, measuring the performance of collection management librarians is difficult in the local environment, and even more problematic in a consortial setting. If libraries are serious about the importance of successful cooperation, it is essential that library administrators find ways to measure success in this arena, and make sure that valuable contributions really count when awarding salary increases and promotions.

Many authors have described the factors which influence the success of cooperative collection development undertakings, and there is no reason to discuss them at length here. It will be useful, however, to review some of them briefly.

Clearly partners in a cooperative collection development enterprise must feel a shared sense that cooperation will provide benefits to each of them, and that there is a compelling reason to put resources into such an effort. The most compelling motive at bottom is financial. In a world with enough money to buy materials, enough catalogers to describe and classify them, and enough shelves to house them, local ownership still provides the best access, especially when print on paper is the medium at issue. Fiscal

realities have never allowed many libraries to operate in anything approaching this setting, and the recent, well-documented pressures on library budgets has made such a model almost unimaginable. The fiscal imperative for cooperation leads immediately toward one of the fundamental conflicts that cooperation entails. Campus and sometimes library administrators expect that cooperative purchasing and sharing can somehow eliminate or reduce the need to find hundreds of thousands of new dollars every year to feed the inflationary appetites of the materials budget. On the other hand, collection officers and bibliographers believe that no less money is needed, but that it can be spent differently, to create more diverse collections, better meeting the needs of researchers. When campus administrators support or instigate cooperative projects, they often arouse immediate suspicion among librarians and faculty that their primary object is to reduce the library's budget, or at least to curtail its growth sharply. Librarians counter that they will need no less than before, but can more effectively meet information needs by spending it differently. Their pleading can induce the cynical view that collection administrators and bibliographers are seeking to maintain the information resources budget at all costs because it remains the primary source of whatever power they possess (Atkinson, p.).

Resource sharing arrangements in general, and cooperative collection development activities in particular, cannot succeed unless they recognize the overriding importance of meeting local needs. Commitments which call for putting consortial priorities above local priorities are unlikely to remain viable for long. Recent efforts, as described by Joseph Branin, have sought to make a virtue of this strong bias for meeting local needs, by attempting to base cooperative programs on local strengths. Under this approach an institution would accept responsibility for collecting for the consortium in areas which also meet local needs, and reflect local strengths. At the same time, a commitment by one library to a particular area does not obligate consortial partners to give up supporting that area itself. As stated by Mosher and Pankake, "[n]o institution should be obliged to give up anything it wants to keep." Recognition then of the importance of the local imperative, then, is a key element of any successful cooperative program. If ignoring the primacy of local needs is a recipe for failure, do cooperative programs that rely on institution's maintaining local strengths in order to meet consortial goals really make a significant difference to what it collects? Or will the institution taking consortial responsibility for a subject acquire more or less the same titles it would have acquired anyway?

Another factor often cited as key to successful cooperation is leadership and vision, on the part of both campus and library leadership, and among faculty and librarians at the operational level. The leadership for many cooperative initiatives has come from above--from provosts or other campus leaders, from library directors, and from collection development officers. This top-down approach can lead to difficulties, because the change in behavior that successful cooperation demands must take place at the level of the librarian making title-by-title decisions. If the selector has no belief in the value of cooperation, and sees no payoff for that change in behavior--or perhaps sees the risk-of a reduced budget, for example--his or her enthusiasm for cooperation is not likely to be

high. The involvement of bibliographers and selectors, not simply in implementing decisions made by others, but in planning and defining the contours or cooperative projects is seen by several observers as critical [citation]. Often overlooked here is the role of university and library leaders in selling the concept of resource sharing and shared collection building on campus, especially to faculty and other researchers. To accept reliance on other libraries' resources demands cultural changes among faculty, who must give up some cherished notions about the self-sufficient collection, browsing, and immediate access. Leadership is required not only to persuade library staff of the merits, or necessity, of cooperation, but also to ensure that the message is delivered to the rest of the academic audience.

Bibliographic and physical access to collections is one of the most obviously important aspects of successful resource sharing. If users cannot discover what consortial partners own, and cannot get it into their hands within an acceptable amount of time, divisions of labor in collection building are fruitless. Although physical proximity has receded as a vital factor in resource sharing arrangements, it can still influence the degree of success experienced. A significant part of interlibrary lending traffic still consists of "returnables," which are more quickly transported by courier among libraries within reasonable geographic proximity. Proximity also allows for easier movement of people to collections, often a more convenient way to share resources. Nevertheless, technology has brought about a measurable reduction in the importance of distance as a part of the equation for successful cooperation. The advent and widespread use of computer networks has also reduced, though not eliminated, the importance of another major barrier to cooperation in the past--the difficulty of communication among selectors and collection officers, and the labor-intensive maintenance of the tools of cooperation. Electronic mail, standards for linking library catalogs and databases, and other elements of the digital revolution have radically improved the ability of selectors to communicate with one another and inform their decision-making with knowledge of the decisions made by counterparts elsewhere. Yet the electronic community enabled by e-mail and the Internet does not replace the human-scale community permitted by face-to-face communication. Particularly when a group of selectors does not know one another from work in national, regional or state settings, such face-to-face meetings offer the best chance of leading to productive working relationships.

Besides access to electronic mail, and support for software that makes group communication by email easier, cooperative collection development efforts can benefit from a number of additional tools and support mechanisms which can improve their chances of success. Many of these tools are emerging from the developments arising from the maturing of library automation, and the growth of networks. Certainly, ready access to the catalogs of consortial partners--especially when those catalogs include acquisitions as well as fully cataloged records--supplies one of the missing ingredients in older cooperative activities: access to the results of partners' decisions at the title level. Yet information and infrastructure is still missing. For example, it remains difficult to identify quickly and conveniently the serial commitments of consortial members. With serial commitments demanding such a significant portion of the budget, the relative

paucity of such information can present serious obstacles to cooperation, especially in those serial-dependent fields that consume significant amounts of research library budgets. Though its effect on collaborative decision-making for future acquisitions is limited, the unevenness of retrospective conversion efforts, and the absence from many catalogs of certain categories of materials (government publications, maps, etc.), can also limit the effectiveness of cooperation.

Many of those writing about cooperative collection development have focused on the need for consortial commitments to match local priorities. Relatively little has been said, however, about the importance of coordinating consortial commitments to purchase with commitments to provide acquisitions, cataloging, preservation and reference services. There is an unspoken assumption, perhaps, that if commitments result from local priorities, the effects on these related services will be minimal. But there is little evidence that acquisitions, cataloging and reference staff have been heavily involved in the development of cooperative projects.

*OMIT? One of the most significant failings of cooperative efforts has been the nearly complete absence of widely accepted and applied measures of success and failure. While it is commonplace to assert that cooperative efforts have largely failed, or at least failed to live up to their promise, there is little or no data to support the assertion. There is not really any agreement on the data that should be collected to support the premise of success or failure. This problem with objective measurement reflects the larger problems that collection development has measuring its effectiveness.*

For the campus administrator interested in slowing the inexorable growth of the acquisitions budget, a rather crude measure--reduction in expenditures--could be applied to measure success. By that token, most cooperative collection building projects have failed utterly. Librarians may counter that the growth rate of expenditures has slowed because of cooperative efforts, an assertion difficult to prove at best. For the bibliographer or collection development officer whose goal is to use the same amount of money differently, to broaden the consortial collection, measures of overlap and uniqueness need to be used more systematically to measure success. Dominguez and Swindler (p.) apply this measure to the long-standing cooperative arrangement among the Research Triangle University Libraries to justify calling it successful. They report that 76% of the titles in their shared on-line catalog were found on only one campus. In this instance, while it seems intuitively probable that the cooperative programs among these universities has affected this percentage, it is impossible to know what the percentage of overlap would have been in the absence of any such programs. Because of its inherent difficulty, there has understandably been little effort to measure the extent of changed behavior caused by cooperative arrangements--particularly the cumulative results of decisions *not* to buy certain materials.

Many have noted that we are in the midst of a transition from a world of scholarly communication dominated by print--the journal and the monograph--to one in which digital, networked information packages will be the vehicle for exchanging information

among researchers. A fundamental question facing those who have done traditional collection development is where to put their limited, much fragmented energies and their resources over the course of this transition. Recently Dan Hazen called into question the value of the traditional collection development policy in the electronic information age. The same skepticism should perhaps be applied to traditional notions of cooperative collection development. If librarians were facing the same fiscal pressures now commanding their attention, but in an unnetworked, non-digital environment (a scenario difficult to imagine, at best) it would perhaps be worthwhile to focus on ways to overcome the obstacles preventing or limiting successful cooperative collection development. The massive challenges facing the academic world in the face of this digital revolution demand that greater attention go to ensure that the development of this new environment favors the advancement of research, teaching and learning. If they do, then it is likely that the goals of cooperative collection development will be achieved almost as an unintended byproduct. If librarians and scholars fail in this effort, then success in cooperative collection building will be largely irrelevant.

Until recently, the entire edifice of resource sharing and cooperative collection development has been based on the assumption that information is contained in physical objects which are relatively difficult to move across space and to share. Even electronic technologies which make this process more efficient--fax and digital transmission of images--are slowed by the need to fetch and handle these physical objects. The relative difficulty of sharing information in this form, and the consequent limited utilization of interlibrary lending services, has masked, until recently, the problems caused by the fact that libraries do not own the information they collect and share, but only the physical containers bearing the information. One possible future in the digital environment would see the creation of new approaches for dealing with intellectual property.

The future of cooperative collection development is inextricably linked to the future of collection development itself. Cooperative collection development exists solely to further the library's goal of meeting local information needs--the classic and traditional function of collection development since before the time it was called collection development. The innate grounding of collection development in the physical object, the distinction between what Ross Atkinson called the collection and the anti-collection, renders its function in the coming digital world questionable at best. Should the Libraries of the US put substantial human resources into adapting and emulating the model provided by the Triangle Universities, or others, in addressing the problems of collecting largely print resources in the late twentieth and early twenty first century? The answer to this question depends on what librarians collectively believe about the pace of the transition from print to electronic, and on the probable shape of that digital realm.

The electronic future may take any of several forms. It is possible to make intelligent guesses about several potential scenarios for such a future, but certainty is inherently out of reach. In what is likely the rosier scenario for the academic community, scholars, scholarly societies, and institutions would assert responsibility for "publishing," organizing, managing, preserving and disseminating the research reports and related

information which they, and other researchers with similar aims and values, produce. Such a scenario could be characterized by practices regarding intellectual property which allow great latitude in the use of information. An alternative scenario would see major academic publishers maintaining control of the distribution of scholarly information, and restricting its flow through licenses that are designed to ensure a revenue stream--whether to make a profit or to subsidize the economic vitality of a scholarly society. In this scenario, the publisher would maintain strict control of intellectual property, and would further control the use of information through licensing with rights more restrictive than those permitted through copyright. At the same time, copyright law in the electronic environment might change in ways that degrade the group of rights known as "fair use." Obviously variations and combinations of these two scenarios are both possible and likely, and other, quite different futures are possible.

Most electronic information available commercially in current environment relies on licensing for use by libraries. The emergence of consortial approaches to licensing such information has led to some of the most dramatic fiscal successes of resource sharing. Unlike traditional cooperative collection development, which seeks to rationalize and distribute responsibility for little-used, marginal publications, shared approaches to licensing tends to focus on high use, much in demand, databases which all or most members of a consortium wish to make available. While the details of individual licenses are often privileged, reports from consortia such as the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, the University of California system, and VIVA, all suggest that considerable savings can result when libraries form partnerships to negotiate access to expensive electronic products. Besides the savings in data costs, such joint licensing will usually save money in terms of staff support for managing the information and computer resources required to store the data and run search software. The experience of negotiating licenses within a consortial setting also raises consciousness among librarians about the sometimes unfavorable terms of licenses. The combined buying power of the consortium has a better chance than do individual libraries of persuading data-providers to alter unacceptable terms, in addition to lowering their prices.

What this change will mean for cooperative collection development is anything but clear, but there are unmistakable signals that it will change its basic terms of reference. Classical cooperative collection development was based in part on the understanding that a large segment of any research collection was seldom used, and that a limited number of copies of this lesser-used material would suffice for a region, or the nation. Collection development librarians were the ones best positioned to identify and select appropriate titles to stock this shared collection of lesser-used research materials. Their qualifications were based on subject knowledge, understanding of the publishing world in that subject, knowledge of academic programs both generally and locally, and familiarity with ways of acquiring sometimes obscure and difficult to get material. Selection for some kind of local ownership will probably continue to play a role in the provision of electronic resources for some time to come. Gradually, however, the function of selection will likely pass more and more into the hands of users, who will exploit the tools provided by libraries and others to identify and retrieve material through the network. One feature of

the new environment which has a basic effect on cooperation is the lessened, if not eliminated, importance of the concepts of location and copy. If access is permitted to an electronic product (by licensing, adequate bandwidth, good interfaces), it does not matter whether the user is on the same campus or half a continent away, nor does it necessarily matter if there is one copy or hundreds. The notion that fewer--or single--copies of lesser used material are enough for a consortium, while multiple copies are needed for materials in local demand, is irrelevant.

Equally unclear is the pace of this change. At present most research libraries still spend around 90% or more of their acquisitions budgets on print, microform, and similar formats. Despite being the center of attention, and despite their high unit cost, electronic resources have not begun to consume even a quarter of the information resources budget of a typical research library. Predictions have differed about how fast the changes suggested above will occur--some believing it will be gradual and prolonged, others that it will be abrupt and is imminent. It seems likely that the shift will occur at different rates in different fields. What, if anything, does this mean for cooperative collection development? It is really a matter of resources and priorities. If the transition to a digital system of scholarly communication is near, the most urgent task for librarians--especially collection management librarians--is to ensure that the system-to-be meets the needs of the academy. One of the truisms of cooperative collection development is that it is difficult and time-consuming. So far, it has at best fallen short of its promise. Are the energies and efforts now being put into cooperative collection development projects not better spent shaping the electronic future in ways that serve the goals of research, scholarship and teaching? Or will the pressures on print research collections continue to be so severe that librarians feel compelled to pay continuing attention to collaborative collection building over the course of the transition? Note that this rhetorical question does not imply that other aspects of libraries' resource sharing efforts--particularly improvements in delivery and bibliographic access--should be slowed. The payoff for making interlibrary lending and borrowing work better will be immediate, and can take advantage of the existing shared collection. The benefits of cooperative collection development may take years to be felt, if they achieve meaningful results at all

The idea that cooperative collection development projects may not be worth doing because the print environment will not survive long enough to allow the labor to make a difference certainly rests on foundations that could be called into question. It is reminiscent of the bracing assumption made by some campus planners that new library buildings will never again be necessary because of the shift to digital resources. Nevertheless, there is enough potential validity in this argument that it should command the attention of those deciding on priorities for librarians' attention over the next decade. If it does not categorically demand reducing the level of priority for cooperative collection development as it is traditionally understood, it does suggest that librarians should give careful attention to the focus of cooperative efforts. Those fields in which the transition to digital formats is likely to take longer, or in which print is expected to retain its hold indefinitely, may well be the best candidates for cooperative activities based on traditional models.

The object of attention of cooperative collection development in the past has chiefly been the information unit--or the subset of information units that comprised a narrowly defined field. Selector involvement was important, because the selector who knew the field that was the object of cooperation was now expected to select for a broader audience--the consortium or even the nation. The availability of subject expertise was assumed to be an indispensable prerequisite of most traditional projects. In the emerging digital world selection for local ownership is likely to recede in importance as the central work of collection development specialists, who by and large comprise the largest group of subject experts in research libraries. What may in part replace this core activity are various kinds of mediation which demand the same kinds of subject knowledge, along with knowledge of the emerging electronic universe. Subject specialists who once functioned primarily as selectors are in the best position both to guide users through the chaotic world of electronic information that is likely to persist for some time, and to play a role in organizing that world and helping to provide markers of quality and appropriateness. Several authors have recently discussed librarians' potential roles in this arena. It seems self-evident that the subject specialist/selector can make a significant contribution to this effort. It seems equally self-evident that this is a task in which cooperation--particularly among research libraries which employ a significant percentage of the subject experts working in American libraries--could play a key role.

If making sense of the emerging digital information environment is one task for selectors in which cooperation can play a role, another is what might be termed transitional cooperative collection management. Cooperative collection development has tended to focus primarily on altering how decisions were made about new additions to the collection. There have of course been a number of cooperative storage and preservation projects, and the Center for Research Libraries was created as a means of managing little used materials collectively. The problems of managing large, less and less frequently used, print collections, characterized by considerable overlap, is likely to become an increasing financial burden for research libraries. Addressing this problem could take two forms, both of them benefiting from collaboration and sharing of resources. First, libraries could work together to make collective decisions about which titles to store, distributing responsibility for retention and allowing for the emptying of potentially miles of shelfspace. Such a program, if is feasible at all, would require selector input, and has complex and serious implications for reference service, not to mention technical services and preservation operations. Second, libraries could collectively approach projects to digitize selected portions of the record of the past. Once again the advantages of collaborating--in selecting what to digitize, in dividing the labor, in sharing expertise--are obvious. The need to be selective, to identify priorities, also calls upon the skills of subject specialists working together in collaboration.

Resource sharing in the past has been based on a scarcity of fiscal resources, which resulted in reductions in the range and depth of information resources individual libraries could make available. In the research library of the late twentieth century, the scarcest resource may well turn out to be human expertise, in subject disciplines, technology,

managerial skills, among others. The sharing of subject specialists, as is now occurring with a joint appointment between Minnesota and Michigan for a South Asian bibliographer, and the pooling of specialists' expertise in planning and implementing projects, may well turn out to be the most important form of resource sharing for the future.