Conspectus is a cool tool

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This issue will focus on the methods and implications of, collection description and evaluation, especially the Conspectus method. The articles result from the seminar organized by the International Relations Group of the Finnish Research Library Association, in co-operation with the Council for Finnish University Libraries, the National Library of Finland, the National Repository Library and the IFLA Acquisition and Collection Development Section in November 2005.

Once again we greatly appreciate the initiative and input of the International Relations Working Group of the Finnish Research Library Association, which, within the past few years, has been especially active in recognizing meaningful current themes and enriching their understanding by organizing international seminars around them. The Group has also managed to coordinate the presentations to be published as international issues, like this one.

The seminar of 2004 was dealing with ontologies; the seminar of 2005 focused on the theme of collection description and evaluation. Both themes have a rich history but also reach far beyond of the library and information field as inherent tools for the knowledge management.

Collection description and evaluation methods have a long tail of 40 years in libraries. Since their beginning as simple subject analyzing tools of printed collections they have grown in depth and breadth into what is called collection mapping. Presently they are seen as effective and versatile subject-based analyzing and benchmarking tools for various purposes. They may give shape and purpose for the management of physical and virtual collections as well as give guidance and orientation for searching in different information environments.

Collection description methods are simply cool tools - flexible, serve many purposes and seem to find their locus in any given information environment. Flexibility is one of the keys of their success. They apply to any size of collections and to many levels, local, national or global, for analysing or benchmarking purposes. They support development of poor collections as well as they may reveal key issues to improve the efficiency of satisfactory collections.

Gordon Dunshire in his article introduces a concept of landscaping describing the collection mapping. Both mapping and landscaping give a visual scenario of this tool - as a flight over the information world showing the directions to the different subject-based "lands".

As the articles indicate, applications of the collection mapping are many, of which the most recent developments are for portals and subject gateways. Rapid development of analyzing tools and extending capabilities of multisearch between the information systems make us expect that we may not yet have seen all the dimensions of the collection mapping.

The challenges for the applications of, collection description, evaluation and mapping are not only technical; they will depend on the willingness of technology developers to recognize the benefits of these tools. While there seems to be continuous discussion on the role and the future of libraries, it is enlightening to find out that some meaningful and promising innovations for the future information environments have their justified roots and may take their future perspectives from the library and information field. It is our mission to recognize these key issues, utilize their benefits and address their usefulness to coherent purposes - to cultivate and provide public and open access to information. As long as we can use our turnkeys for a change, lets go for it.