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From the Editor

Environmental Communication on the Internet-- Where is it going?

Maria Jankowska

Editor

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On sabbatical for the whole year!!! First reaction - it's great; second reaction - it's too long. What will I do with my time and life during these twelve months? My sabbatical project needs to be finished, but it is also time to experience something new, different, and exciting. I was asked to teach four library courses in one of the library and information science schools in Poland. One of the classes is a course on Green Information Sources. When I found out about the course, I asked myself, what should I present to Polish library students in this class? This question has been on my mind for more than a few months. Editing an electronic journal, which is mainly devoted to disseminating information about sources on environmental protection, conservation, education, and management of natural resources, is very helpful, but still it does not answer my question. Editing the journal is a far different task from teaching library school students about environmental information sources. Trying to find an answer, I started to browse the Internet.

After a brief search, I found the amount of environmental information available on the Internet almost perplexing. The Environmental Guide to the Internet, published by the Government Institutes, alone lists nearly 200 listservs, Usenet groups, electronic journals and newsletters, bulletin boards, and other sources on the broad subject of the environment. And, to this long list, one has to add a multitude of home pages concentrating on environmental issues. One can quickly become overwhelmed by the plethora of electronic sources, combined with printed sources such as books, directories, magazines and newspapers, newsletters, bulletins, reports, brochures, pamphlets, fact sheets, and government documents. Even with all this wealth of information sources, however, it is still not uncommon to find people looking for specific information without success. Why?

In many cases, using Internet search engines does not help to locate environmental resources (look at Czeslaw Grycz's editorial, EGJ issue 2, no. 2). For example, using the Open Text Index to search the Internet, I found 127,860 home pages containing the words : "environment and information." The public needs and wants to learn more about the

environment, but some people feel overwhelmed by the growing amount of green information. With the large number of choices available on the Internet, people are often faced with the following basic dilemmas. Where to start? How to find what is needed? How to minimize time and effort, and yet find exactly what one wants?

Should we really be concerned with these questions? Whenever I look for specific information, I find other interesting sites that I have not seen before. The discovery of new sites, which are not censored or sponsored by big corporations gives one comfort that finally people have equal access to the open media, and they can express their concerns, worries, and even unpopular views. In the Internet setting it is not so important that one represent a prestigious institution such as Yale, Harvard, Stanford, or Berkeley. The merit of your message counts more than the institution to which you belong. See the following home pages which are not necessarily from famous institutions: Green & Growing Environmental Education Project, Pesticide Action Network North America, Green Arrow Guide's Field Trip Program, Issues of Environmental Coexistence, or Service Office for the Environmental Movement. This new open media is especially important for issues related to the environment. I truly believe that the Internet is the most democratic communication forum of the 20th century. This is probably the most important idea that I will teach in my Green Information Sources class. The Internet as a tool of democracy will play a more important role than all of the assistance for environmental protection and "democratic education" coming from the Western countries to Eastern Europe and Poland. I will teach my library students not to wait for any help to restore their damaged environments. It is their place, where they live and they know better than western advisors how to fix their own environment. What is really needed in this part of Europe is environmental education and the active participation of citizens in environmental protection. I will concentrate my teaching on the idea that it is the librarians' responsibility to teach the public how to find relevant information which can make them more aware of environmental issues. Librarians should create specific subject access tools on the WWW and collect a hot-list of the most useful sites for their public's needs.

Environmental communication on the Internet is expanding rapidly. It is hard to predict where it is going, but certainly it allows everybody to participate and learn. Let's use it and enjoy.

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