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Reference and information services: an introduction

When getting the fifth edition of any book for review, one already knows that this is a successful book that has been proved useful to the relevant audience and used by it extensively. The authors of the Reference and information services also provide an additional argument to publishing this extensive reference guide: new knowledge and experience accumulated by reference librarians and libraries during the Covid19 pandemic. Definitely, we have learned a lot during this pandemic close-down, not only about health, but also about trustworthiness of information and threat posed by misinformation, the role of information structures and information literacy, about living in isolation and need for real life experience.

I have called this extensive volume a reference guide for a specific audience of reference librarians, any library worker and information specialists dealing with users at large. However, it has served as an informative aid for the students in library and information studies, for competence development and similar aims. Thus, it can also be regarded as an extensive textbook. This dual purpose is achieved by logical structure of the whole book and each of its chapters, recommendations for further reading at the end of each chapter, multiple illustrations and vignettes inside the text, appendix of RUSA (Reference and User Services Association, a division of American Library Association) outstanding reference sources and definition of reference, and extensive index at the end of the book.

From the latest edition, this one differs by including two additional chapters: chapter 10, Answering questions about health; and chapter 15, Reference as programming, and slight changes in the structure of part IV. However, some parts of the text are also significantly updated in various aspects – it is an instrument reflecting the state-of-the-art of reference work in libraries.

The basic structure of the book has remained the same as in the previous edition: presentation of the fundamental concepts in the part I, presentation of major reference sources in the part II, introduction of special topics, such as the Internet as a reference tool, readers' advisory services and reference as programming in part III, and management of the reference collections and services. To my eyes, this is an effective presentation of the vast material collected by the authors that they have already used. Do not mend it if it is not broken, is a good policy to follow.

Since being a student, I have always wondered how useful it is to provide material about major reference sources when they were changing so rapidly already in the 1970s. The enumeration of various information sources and their groups seemed rather useless and boring. If one is trained as information specialist, one should be able to find the best ways to answer the user queries. I still have retained this scepticism and would question the whole of part II, which spans over half of the book. On the other hand, the authors have found a way to present the whole classification of reference sources in terms of the content of asked questions and present their general characteristics and methods of using them.

I also would like a better explanation of the contents in the part III, explaining why these five topics were covered in it and not some others, but again, it is the choice of the authors and the topics are important for all library and information professionals.

All in all, I think that this fifth edition of Reference and information services will be as popular among librarians and students as the previous four and would like to congratulate the authors on a job well done.

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