The Information-seeking Behaviours of the "Global" Scholar: Comparing Closed and Open Stacks in European & North American Research Libraries

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the information-seeking behaviours of humanities scholars and their perceptions of library resources in closed (Europe) and open (North America) stacks.
No study comparing behaviours in both stack infrastructures has been made to date.

Research Questions

1. What are humanities scholars' opinions on the resources offered in both stack infrastructures?
2. How do they obtain their primary and secondary materials in both scenarios?
3. When and how does serendipity occur?

Open stacks, Dartmouth College (NH); www.dartmouth.edu

Methods

Participants recruited by circulating the survey on listservs, met these criteria:

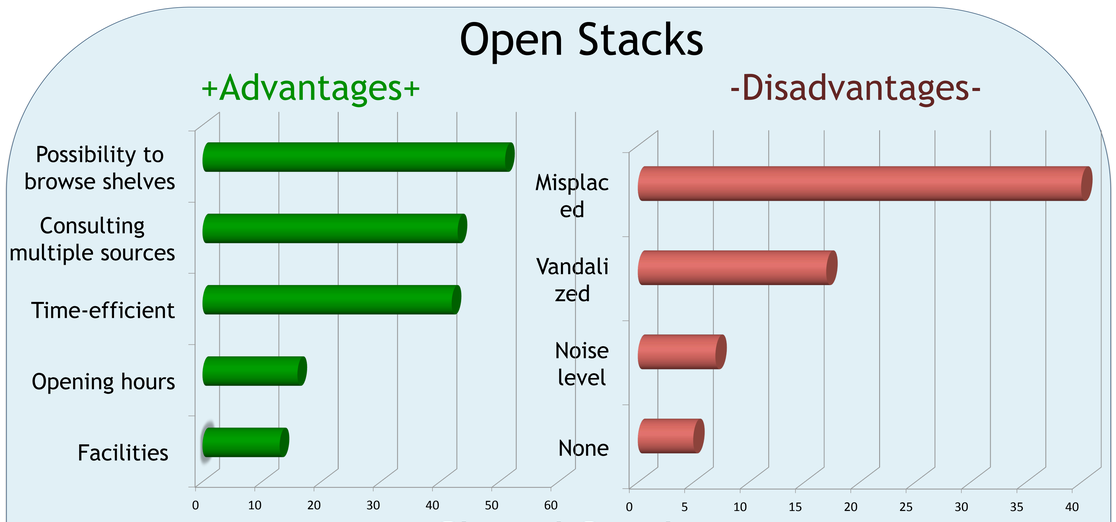
- Graduate, postdoctoral or faculty scholar
- Researcher in both stack infrastructures & continents

A 24-question qualitative survey, with both closed and open-ended questions divided in:

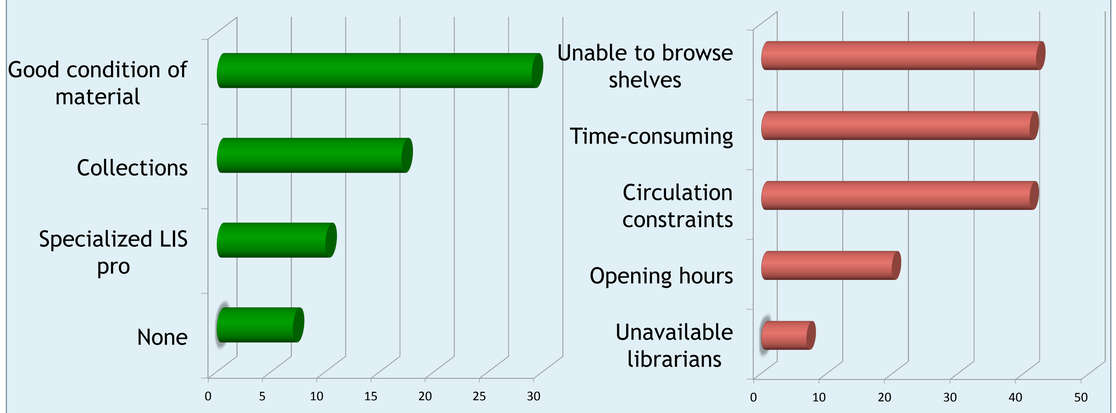
A. Researcher Profile
B. Sought Material
C. Closed and/or Open Stacks
D. Browsing & Serendipity
E. User Services & Resources

As of April 7, 2015, 81 participants responded to the survey (51 complete, 30 incomplete). The data from the incomplete surveys has also been tabulated in the results.

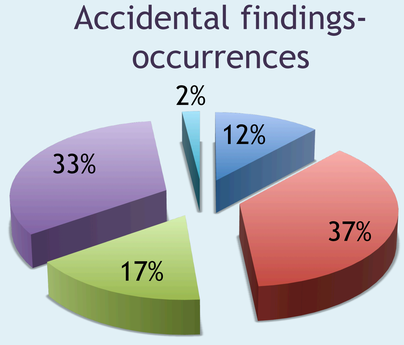
Open Stacks

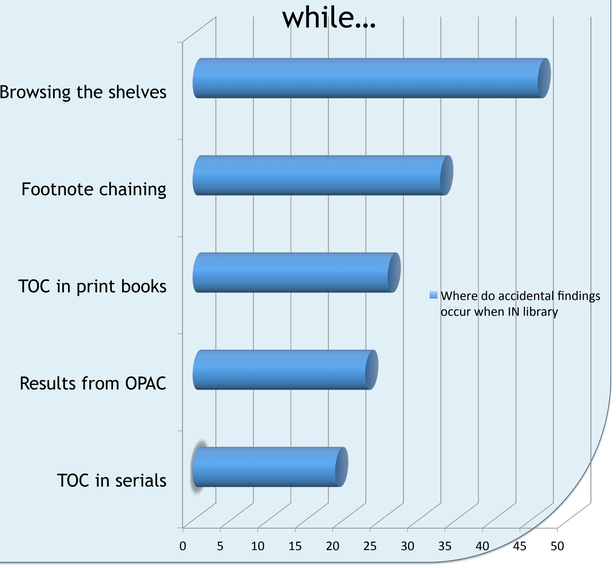


Closed Stacks



Serendipity

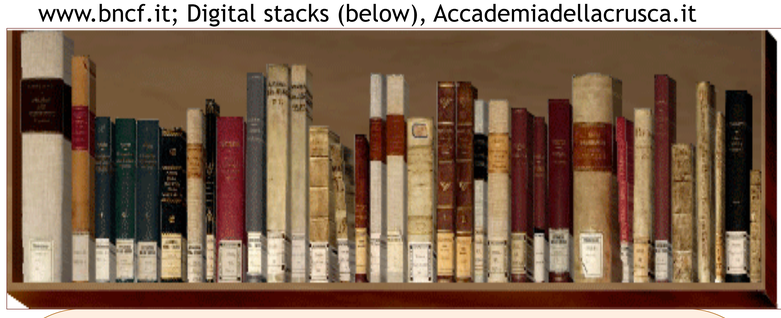




Preliminary Findings

- 64% state the importance to *physically* browse the stacks and 57% hope for serendipitous finds
- 15% browse digital stacks; A growing trend in EU
- 54% contact a subject librarian/archivist from NON affiliated institutions versus only 5% at the home institution.
- Only 12% use RSS feeds/alerts from discipline-linked database to keep abreast with their field of research

Closed stacks (above), Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze www.bncf.it; Digital stacks (below), Accademiadellacrusca.it



Discussion

The humanities scholars show some similarities in their information-seeking behaviours with the "historians" defined in the existing LIS literature:

- Seldom consult a subject/liaison librarian
- Frequently perform footnote "chaining"

However, they seem to differ from "historians" as they:

- Consult more digital replicas of primary sources
- Use Google Books for primary & secondary sources
- Frequently contact curating archivists/librarians prior to traveling to a European institution for research

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