

Chapter LIII

The European Approach Towards Digital Library Education: Dead End or Recipe for Success?

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ABSTRACT

Triggered by a rapid diffusion of ICT within the last two decades, libraries have undergone a (r)evolutionary change in both mission and services. Step by step, libraries diversified their mission from a media holding institution towards a multimedia content provider in a physical and digital environment. To run a library in this way, highly qualified staff with LIS background is brought into focus. The article deals with the situation in European LIS institutions and its programs, particularly with regard to digital library. The crucial question will be: what kind of paradigm, if at all, exists with regard to the digital library phenomenon? Furthermore, some trends in libraries services and conceptions are presented.

A NEW QUANTUM LEAP?

During the last two decades, we can make out two vital reasons why libraries changed from a mere media holding institution towards a multimedia access and content provider in a physical and a digital environment: The rapid development of effective and efficient information and commu-

nication technology (ICT) and the vital change of patron behavior. Both tendencies are captured in terms like hybrid library, virtual library, digital library, or simply: the Information and Knowledge Society. As a library cannot offer its services without more or less visible and qualified staff, we will now have a look at the LIS educational and training programs in Europe, especially in Germany, Great Britain and the Nordic Countries.

THE BURDEN OF BEING TRENDY

An excellently managed and organized library is an innovative library, or better: a learning library. Learning from our patrons by listening is a very helpful method. Another one: Learning how to use ICT to improve access to both analog and digital information resources, which can be found in my library or in the depth of the Internet (keyword: deep or semantic Web). These skills have something to do with research, qualified and motivated staff, and the readiness for experiments. But how far shall we go? In what trend shall we invest our scarce resources? How can we make out a “Mayfly“ in advance? Against the background, we will now describe the status of digital libraries in European LIS programs. A good orientation is given by Saracevic and Dalbello (2001). They simply ask:

- “Why teach digital libraries?” (→ Actual library practice)
- “What to teach about digital libraries?” (→ Selection problem)
- “How to teach digital libraries?” (→ Curricula, course offering)

Having scanned LIS programs on B.A. and M.A. level, especially in Germany, in the Nordic Countries and the United Kingdom, we, in general recognized that all centers of education and training offer courses in electronic data processing (EDP), digital document handling, information retrieval, library software, and sometimes also JAVA, XML, PHP and so on. At first sight most of the LIS institutions of higher education in Europe seem to be prepared to meet the digital challenge.

The key question in this context is: What kind of “philosophy,” or better: paradigm do these centers cultivate? Do they handle the subject “digital library (DL)” as a phenomenon, which is to be found in the world of libraries, that means: outside of the LIS institutions, or do they regard

the DL as a challenge for own research and development? Depending on the perspective, one can concentrate on analyzing the phenomenon and offering relevant tools (in the sense of knowledge acquisition), on the other hand, one can educate and train specialists to take part in research projects (in the sense of a institution of *applied science*). To become engrossed in DL, we should not turn a blind eye to other library concepts and trends.

FUTURE TRENDS

Trying to be a fortune-teller in a complex or chaotic world is a very unpleasant venture. In the wake of the last two decades there are at least four scenarios for the nature of a library. Scenario one describes the library as a physical meeting place with library near services and various non-library services for leisure activities (e.g., Kindergarten, fitness center, Internet workspaces). The Idea Store concept in the United Kingdom is a successful example for this strategy. Another scenario can be found nearly everywhere in public and scientific libraries all over the world (in Idea Stores too): The hybrid library, a synthesis of a physical library with its holding and digital based services like a (Web-)OPAC or access to the Internet in general and to the deep Web (e.g., with costs content in particular). A third scenario focuses on the DL per se.

Actually, we have no generally accepted definition of DL (Saracevic & Dalbello, 2001). In a broader sense, DL may be subdivided into the virtual or Internet-based library like the German “Virtual Special Libraries” (ViFA: Virtuelle Fachbibliotheken) or “The European Library“ hosted at the National Library of the Netherlands and the fully automated library like the Jurong City Library in Singapore or the Swedish Bokomaten: a “complete” library of the size of an ATM for train stations, gas stations or department stores. Last but not least, the Cybrary—the library in

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