

Tilburg University

## Collecties en digitale dienstverlening = Collections and digital services

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## Hans Geleijnse *Collections and Digital Services*

Librarians who have worked with Wim van Drimmelen have seen, as he has, many changes to their duties, tasks and systems in the world of libraries and information. Over the last fifteen years, these changes have been considerable. This becomes patently obvious when you try to disassociate yourself from this world.

During the eighties, Dutch libraries took steps to automate their business processes, most with the help of the co-operative organization Pica (Project for Integrated Catalogue Automation). The development towards a shared automated catalogue was then in full swing and the first, small results had become visible to users. Even so, the central themes for a university library remained in 'collection' and in 'acquisition'. Publications about libraries and library fashions bear witness to this. The most salient example is perhaps the 1983 farewell compilation for librarian J.R. de Groot from Leiden, entitled *Boeken verzamelen (Collecting books)*. Magazine collections and, in particular, the quality and quantity of the book collection and the capacity to continually expand it with new and old acquisitions was determined by the status of a library. This capacity decisively differentiated the libraries.

Concrete ideas about the possibilities and consequences of computerization for the acquisition and assembly of a collection, but primarily for end-user services, barely existed in the eighties. The first Pica

Congress on the 'Effects of Collaborating on Library Automation' concentrated mainly on the potential to collaborate on the releasing of literature and its related operating criteria. The spotlight was turned on the need for systematic retro cataloguing. The catalogue was still deemed 'the heart of the library'. Nevertheless, and with hindsight, this immense focus on retro cataloguing could be called a blessing, especially when you consider that, in 2008, renowned libraries in other European countries have still not completed 'their work' in this area.

Only a few publications that appeared in our country opened a window onto the future. Hendrik Casimir stressed in 1987 during a speech on the four hundred year anniversary of Leiden University that we '(can) hardly doubt the necessity of the computer to administer a continually increasing flow of information.' This eminent scholar envisioned that electronics would offer hordes of opportunities 'to accommodate a large library in a small cupboard.' Developing concrete ideas from this were, nonetheless, still difficult; books and magazines could maybe be photographed in small format, or recorded with a video camera and then put onto videotapes.

In the same year, John Mackenzie Owen signalled in *Bibliotheek, Informatie & Computer* the fundamental significance of replacing printed documents with electronic publications. 'That remains, however, just a theory, all the time there are no electronic publications.' According to him, the main reason for this lack of electronic publications was the lack of necessary infrastructure in libraries and universities. That was certainly the case, but neither were the publishers in a position to actually deliver publications electronically. Mackenzie Owen envisioned two forms of information maintenance: 'One based on the traditional function of the library, with an increasing emphasis on the administration of cultural heritage. The other, a completely new form of information maintenance, focused on the efficient provision of information using electronic systems. This last form of information maintenance shall, in all probability, develop outside current library methods and outside the organizational structure of the library.'

So new ideas existed, but without a coherent vision of the 'library of the future'. I believe this was first unfolded in 1989 by Leo Wieërs, my predecessor as librarian to the University of Tilburg, in publications such as *The New Library and the Development of Innovative Information*

*Services*. He placed the application of electronic possibilities in a broader perspective and outlined a convincing new role for the library. As far as I can ascertain, his concept was also internationally unique because nowhere else had the different aspects of the end-user re automated initiatives been combined with an actual implementation plan in a university library. A concrete plan had been added to the vision and theory and actually implemented.

The key points of this 'Tilburg concept' were the optimal use of information technology, for example scanning magazines, introducing the 'lending vending machine' for lending out books, allowing electronic access to information in books and magazines from the workplace, and integrating various computer applications. Staff and students would get an 'integrated workstation' with tools to make the best use of information as well as being able to produce new information. At the opening of the new library in 1992, Tilburg raised eyebrows by installing 2000 of these integrated workstations on campus, of which 450 were in the library itself. This advanced and homogenous infrastructure was one of the most important conditions in successfully concluding the first site license agreement with Elsevier Science several years later and so redeeming a pledge to access 'full text in the workplace'.

Likewise, these developments resulted in a change in the nineties in the criteria that determined the importance and status of a university library. In addition to traditional collections, there was also focus on the extent to which electronic facilities were offered and the infrastructure and facilities that were made available to students and staff. Universities also became increasingly sensitive to rankings. The annual publication of *Elsevier* – which contained the assessments of students and lecturers on the quality of the education – and the selection guide to higher education gave indicators and created instruments for ranking for university executives. They gave rise to questions such as: are we doing well, and are we sufficiently attractive to students? In other words, are we paying attention? The most important criteria now appear to be opening hours, availability of study material, computer facilities and workstations. The extent and quality of the collection were evidently less important.

This led to many changes in the nineties, and certainly in each individual university library. The universities competed with each other

as far as was possible using self-built library applications and smart local solutions, and each tried as far as was possible to acquire digital information and to make it available on the largest scale feasible.

That was the main change of the twenty-first century. Nowadays, the negotiations for licences are well coordinated with publishers, leading to all universities having access to nearly all available electronic magazines, books and databases. There are small differences between them, but in essence, the lecturer and the student in Amsterdam can access the same electronic information that the student and lecturer in Nijmegen can. This information can be consulted in the library or just as easily at home or at another location.

As regards current collections, there is no longer any material difference between the universities. One library can perhaps buy more in one area than another, but there is no longer any real distinction between them. Any distinction remaining lies almost exclusively with the inherited collection. Self-built library applications belong to the past, and systems will be increasingly purchased collectively from large commercial parties or run with Open Source solutions by a consortium.

The tendency to outsource technical administration as well as applications administration shall, therefore, only increase. This requires, as set out in the UKB policy plan 2007–2010, an intensification of national co-operation. This rightly argues for a package of powers 'to make possible services which exceed the nature or extent of the resources of the individual institution.'

Accordingly, there is a vision in which university libraries are served by one or more shared service centres – perhaps positioned nationally first and then internationally later on – to manage the information, to ensure it is made accessible, and to regulate the correct and safe access to information. In the same way, books, magazines and other information files will be electronically accessible. On all these points, differences between the universities of, say, Groningen and Rotterdam will disappear.

An exciting question is how far the not for profit organizations such as OCLC will be able to retain their administrative and coordinating role. Common sense dictates that libraries' most important development of the last ten years has been initiated by commercial parties. In many respects, a company like Google must have shaken libraries awake by digitalizing complete research

libraries and thereby simply doing what libraries have been talking about for years.

If we look at access to information, this nonetheless threatens to shift gradually from the public domain to the private domain. There still remains the question after all of who gets access to digitalized collections of the University of Michigan and the other 'Google libraries' and under which conditions. If the national governments and the European Commission keep back from paying for the digitization process, we can expect many libraries to try developing by seeking salvation with commercial parties or forming public-private partnerships.

What are the distinguishing features of a university library in the year 2008 against the backdrop of all these developments? Many libraries have refurbished their physical spaces and converted into study centres, sometimes exclusively for individual study, sometimes more focused on group work, which are linked as far as is possible to the demands of the university's educational programmes. The distinction between universities is, as a rule, primarily in the quality of its education and research. The extent to which a library can offer support and deliver added-value knowledge in a contemporary way, shall, in my view, remain the crucial distinguishing element. Libraries have also focused, quite rightly, on releasing and making accessible university production, scientific publications, research data, theses and educational publications. In the meantime, all Dutch universities have been equipped with an institutional repository to support this process and to make publications more visible in the interest of the author, his or her faculty and the university itself. Repositories serve another interest. In a *Position Paper of the American Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC)* in 2002, it was surprisingly remarked upon that 'institutional repositories offer a strategic response to systematic problems in the existing scholarly journal system.'

Repositories and the stimulation of Open Access are also at the heart of the *Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche (LIBER)*. Repositories now perform a central duty for nearly all large research libraries in Europe. That is the case in Oxford and Göttingen, but also Prague and Florence. All the libraries combine caring for old possessions with new possessions. It's about electronic access to these collections but also conservation for the future.

In that respect, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek under Wim van Drimmelen has actually taken admirable initiatives and chosen a strategy that has made the KB currently world leader in 'digital preservation'. As president of LIBER, I am glad that the KB has not only focused on the publications of large international publishers but is also willing to act as an e-Depot for publications which have been acquired by repositories. It's exceptional that this role is not limited to just the Netherlands. I hope and assume that the KB and LIBER can serve many libraries throughout Europe in the coming years. A national library can thus fulfil the role of an international library in specific fields. I think that we can be very proud of that. Wim and his staff deserve respect and admiration for this.

With this development, another traditional role of the university gradually shifts elsewhere. The maintenance of electronic publications is, after all, no task an individual library would be willing to take on. It is a task they would like to hand over to a reliable partner.

The changes outlined briefly above create space for the university library to provide new forms of services, that are more tailored and more associated to the specific requirements of research groups and programmes. One of the greatest challenges is to improve the connection of the world of the digital library with the electronic learning and research environment. I am convinced that, despite Google, there is still a world to conquer if libraries are prepared to share their knowledge and co-operate with each other.

However, I am also just as convinced that librarians shall be fairly powerless in their mission if they do not also co-operate locally with functional administrators of education and research applications and with IT specialists. For the University of Tilburg, this was also an important consideration when integrating IT services with the AV service and the library. Not to suppress the library, but to better utilize the expertise that exists and the information sources that are available. After all, it's not about independence but about the further development and dissemination of knowledge. For the present, the university library still plays a role in this. In whichever form that may be.

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