



Editorial: Research Libraries Getting Ready for 2020

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LIBER's 40th anniversary this summer was both a reason for celebration and reflection. A record-breaking 400 librarians from Europe and elsewhere came to the Rector Gabriel Ferraté Library of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya in Barcelona, to attend the 40th Annual Conference which was entitled 'Getting Europe ready for 2020: the library's role in research, education and society'.¹ Under the bright Barcelona sun the participants enjoyed a flawlessly organised conference with a generous social programme. However, as for the libraries' role in 2020, some serious questions were raised, especially by the invited plenary speakers. In the digital age, this role is no longer self-evident.

OCLC's US Research Director Lorcan Dempsey took an economic view in his analysis.² In the course of history, universities established libraries because there was much to gain from having stores of knowledge locally available for research and learning. But in the age of Internet, information can be accessed anywhere, and universities are facing budget constraints. They may have to choose between building a climbing wall and spending on the library. Bangor University in Wales went so far as to conclude that 'searching has been deskilled' and the library could be disbanded. Although this decision, it seems, was not implemented, it is undisputable that the research library's position in the university network has changed dramatically.

So what do libraries do, when their role as collection stewards is no longer valued? They find other ways to support research and learning — or they will be gone by 2020, Rick Luce of Emory University (US) predicted. Both

Luce and Herbert van de Sompel of Los Alamos Laboratory (US) painted pictures of the rapidly evolving e-research landscape that must have taken quite a few librarians' breath away. A machine-actionable web of data, nano-publications, zetabytes of dynamic data, cloud services — they all require a fundamental shift in library policy — and culture.³

Are the LIBER research libraries ready to meet this challenge? This issue of *LIBER Quarterly*, the first of two issues devoted to the Annual Conference, will provide a (partial) answer by publishing some of the more notable presentations from the conference.

Graham Stone, Dave Pattern and Bryony Ramsden of the University of Huddersfield start out by asking a question that befits a library that is no longer self-evident: 'Does library usage affect student attainment?' The Huddersfield project team find a *correlation* between library usage and student attainment, although a causal effect is yet to be demonstrated. More research is needed to provide library directors with powerful arguments when trying to negotiate budget — but asking the right questions is the beginning of all answers.

The Conference's hosts, the Rector Gabriel Ferraté Library of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC) serves a community with a very high uptake of electronic devices, and Beatriz Benítez Juan, Javier Clavero Campos, Miquel Codina Vila and Andrés Pérez Gálvez report on the library's project to 'deliver library services by the preferred means of communication of a new generation of students and teachers', thereby 'lending the library an image of ubiquity, service orientation and modernity.'

In a globalised information space, barriers between institutions and sectors must be removed. Henriette Reerink of Amsterdam University Library describes the UNICUM project, a web portal to Dutch academic heritage in which metadata barriers between archives on the one hand and library and museum collections on the other are being addressed.

At Complutense Library (Madrid), the confines of the individual institution were seen to jeopardise the library's digitisation ambitions and ensuing digital preservation obligations, as described by José A. Magán, Manuela Palafox, Eugenio Tardón and Amelia Sanz. Complutense Library sought partnerships with Google, for digitisation, and with HathiTrust in the US, for digital

preservation — resulting in 120,000 volumes becoming digitally available to a wide audience. Magán *et al.* conclude that ‘international cooperation [is] the best way to ensure the survival of academic and research libraries in the future’.

The fact that collaboration in digital preservation pays off is sufficiently demonstrated by Esa-Pekka Keskitalo who presents the cost-benefit calculations behind the Finnish plan for a national digital preservation organisation for libraries, archives and museums. Although precise figures are scarce in a field as young as digital preservation, the savings of a shared preservation system are estimated at ca. €8 million annually.

Collaboration is certainly at the centre of LIBER’s own activities, as demonstrated by Paul Ayris in his review of LIBER’s policy and projects. Ayris also contributes a report on the OAI7 Workshop in Geneva last June on innovations in scholarly communication. The UK Research Information Network (RIN) investigated the costs and benefits of transitions in scholarly communications, and Michael Jubb summarises the ensuing report. Research into costs and benefits is always difficult, as there are so many parameters and sunk costs that are difficult to estimate. Yet, the RIN report concludes that for the UK, only the Gold route to open access will bring substantial benefits. In practice, however, a mosaic of different alternatives is expected to emerge.

Jackie Dooley of OCLC Research (US) draws attention to the position of special collections in the digital age, noting a rapid growth of these collections. However, ‘the daunting challenges of managing born-digital archival materials have begun to loom large among the concerns of academic and research libraries. ... Born-digital materials have to date been under-collected, many institutions do not know how much material they have, true preservation capabilities are not yet in place, and few materials are accessible for use.’ Dooley is basing her conclusions on research carried out in the US, but I would argue that Europe is not doing much better. Tackling the born-digital challenge will require many more barriers between institutions, countries and sectors to be pulled down.

A sponsored article by Ido Peled of Ex Libris about designing a digital preservation system, two conference reports and a book review conclude this

issue of *LIBER Quarterly*. A second issue with materials from the Annual Conference will follow shortly.

Notes

¹ Conference website with videos and powerpoints at <http://bibliotecnica.upc.edu/LIBER2011/>.

² Lorcan Dempsey, 'The University Library: reconfiguring organizational boundaries in a network environment, video at <http://hdl.handle.net/2099.2/2536>.

³ Rick Luce, 'From here to the clouds: eResearch and the research library', video at <http://hdl.handle.net/2099.2/2479>; also see my blog post at <http://digitaalduurzaam.blogspot.com/2011/06/more-digital-wake-up-calls-for-academic.html>; and Herbert van de Sompel, 'Towards machine-actionable scholarly communication', video at <http://hdl.handle.net/2099.2/2520>, blog post at <http://digitaalduurzaam.blogspot.com/2011/06/global-web-of-data-depends-on-machine.html>.