

## Book review

**Karen Calhoun.** *Exploring digital libraries: foundations, practice and prospects.* London: Facet Publishing, 2014, 322 pp. ISBN 978-1-85604-820-0

The vast literature on digital libraries, covering different aspects of this phenomenon, poses a lot of pressure on any author offering a new publication in the field. With a wide selection of textbooks, collections of essays and studies on the topic, it is not an easy task to develop a novel and original approach to digital libraries. In her book *“Exploring digital libraries: foundations, practice, prospects”* Karen Calhoun suggests her interpretation of this well-known subject. The book aims at providing a comprehensive overview of current developments in digital library research and practice.

The structure of the publication is based on the content of the conceptual map of the digital library domain developed by the author. As a result of an analysis of 440 papers published in *D-Lib Magazine*, Karen Calhoun mapped the pre-dominant topics of digital library research and practice in 2002–2012. As further discussion reveals, this is both the major advantage and the limitation of her book.

In the concept map the themes are organized as a matrix with two major axes: where *x* embraces the continuum between collections and communities, *y* covers the continuum between technological and socio-economic aspects of digital libraries. Topics that prevailed in the analyzed papers mostly covered digital library issues relevant for academic and research libraries, although some of them also included digitization and development digital heritage libraries. Other digital library developments (e.g. relevant for public libraries etc.) are mentioned occasionally.

The book consists of ten chapters. Chapter 1 and 2 provide an overview of digital library definitions, research and development history, while Chapter 3 delineates the major challenges for the present digital libraries as reflected in the *D-Lib Magazine* papers. Several chapters (namely, 4, 8 and 9) discuss the issues relevant for academic and research libraries. These are subject and

institutional repositories, including broader social, technological and legal settings of their operation, scholarly communication changes in the light of web 2.0 developments and tools. In Chapter 3 (*Hybrid library*) part of discussion may be relevant for public libraries. However, here and in other chapters one could feel that the author is mainly interested in discussing large-scale digital libraries for scholars – either academic or research libraries providing special collections online. This may create some confusion for an inexperienced reader because information is presented as if some issues are general for all digital libraries. However, they are mainly relevant for large-scale repositories of scholarly content.

Taking into account the scarcity of discussions of social roles of digital libraries in comparison with numerous researches of information management practices, technological frameworks and tools, Chapter 6 (*Social roles of digital libraries*) seems to be the most intriguing. However, its content disappoints – it is the shortest chapter in the book (covering only 18 pages). “A marketplace for ideas” as a possible role suggested by Christine Borgman in 1996 and quoted in the chapter seems to highlight interesting and relevant perspectives in the digital library development. However, there is no further discussion and reflection, although there are many examples, especially in the domain of hybrid libraries, where a combination of the digital and the material creates a new approach for inspiring personal growth and creativity. One of the instances is a huge building of the National Digital Library in South Korea, which provides an inspiring space and digital tools for creative re-use of the vast collections available at the Dibrary mega-portal containing approximately 0.1 billion digital resources (About dibrary, 2007).

Cultural heritage and mass-digitization of special collections is one of the topics covered by the conceptual map of the digital library domain. Relevant topics such as using web 2.0 tools, crowdsourcing and other ways of user participation and engagement in creation and enhancement of digital content are discussed. However, there are a lot of gaps in the discussion of the latest trends, although comprehensive literature and research is in place. The following issues are poorly treated or are absent altogether: the outcomes of collaboration between archives, libraries and museums (is Europeana, discussed in several chapters, a digital library/an archive/a museum?); emerging players outside of the memory institution community and socially-oriented digital heritage projects (e.g. Historypin, <http://www.historypin.com/>); the increasing capabilities of internet users to create alternative digital

community archives (libraries/museums); the changing approach to authority and role of memory institutions in interpreting the past in the digital space (e.g. see Terras, 2010; Flinn, 2010).

To conclude – the author provided an approach to the digital library phenomenon, which is relevant for the *LIBER Quarterly* readership: professionals and researchers interested in the development of large-scale digital research libraries. Students who are described as one of the target audience of the book may find it difficult to comprehend all developments unless they have a fluent knowledge in the field of scholarly communication. The book is useful for providing an overview of the newest digital library research and pointing to interesting sources for further investigation. However, the over-structured content of the chapters is uncomfortable for reading: some sections of the chapters consist of only a few paragraphs; there is a complex and inconvenient system of subtitles.

## References

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