

Collection directions and pandemic effects



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Na een hels coronajaar laden we de batterijen terug op in de bossen in Auvergne. Geen betere plek om alles even te laten bezinken, nieuwe energie te tanken en om even over de toekomst van het werkveld te mijmeren. Een e-mailinterview met Lorcan Dempsey (OCLC) helpt hier natuurlijk bij. En omdat we daar in het vakantiehuis geen wifi hebben en geen stabiel 4G-bereik, trekken we regelmatig naar een Frans cafeetje om de nieuwe antwoorden te lezen. Van de nood een deugd maken, heet zoiets.

TEKST Paul Buschmann

A lot of your work on library services mentions a change in collection directions. Is it fair to say that the traditional just-in-case model no longer works?

We might say that the just-in-case collection is an acquired collection. The library purchases or licenses a range of material for local use. In this model, the library is at the centre and students and researchers come to the library or visit the library website. However, we know this has been unsustainable for a variety of reasons. The first is cost. But more importantly, no single library can continue to acquire enough materials to satisfy all local demands. This is not just a volume issue, where publication volumes continue to grow. It is also a variety issue, where there is increasing

diversification of the resource base of interest. Think of the changes open access have made and will continue to make. Think of interest in podcasts, videos, and the growing interest in newsletter and other manifestations of the creator economy. Think of how science has changed in a network environment, so that there is interest in research data, preprints, software, workflows, and so on. Given this volume and variety, we have seen a move towards what I have called the 'facilitated collection,' where the goal is to better support students and researchers by assembling a range of network resources around their needs. The student or researcher is now at the centre. The library's goal is to arrange for a coordinated mix of local, external and collaborative resources responding to varied user needs. This activity peels away from the locally managed collection and grows to include advice and consultancy about creation and information practices in a complex environment.

In this context, we could say that the borders of collections have become more fluid.

Exactly. The boundaries between discovery and delivery are being hidden, resources are assembled to meet particular needs. Think for example of the phenomenal rise of strongly curated discovery (library guides and reading lists) which links to resources of interest whether or not they have been acquired by the library. Think of cooperative services, where a user has access to resources across a group of libraries. Think of on-demand acquisitions. Think of providing discovery access to resources elsewhere – collections of e-books, open access collections, and so on. In fact, we have seen something of a reversal of roles between collections and discovery. The collection used to drive discovery – the catalogue or the discovery layer allowed you to prospect the acquired collection. However, now, discovery drives the collection. Directly in relation to demand-driven acquisition models, but more generally in the sense that the library wants to help the user with what is broadly accessible, not merely locally acquired.

Besides the already mentioned facilitated access model, do you see any other potential alternatives to the traditional just-in-case model? You have written a lot about a so-called inside-out model. Can you explain?

This model arises from the reconfiguration of research work by the network environment. Research is collaborative, facilitated by automated workflows (laboratory information systems, scientific workflow systems, lab notebooks, citation management, scholarly networking sites ...) and generates a variety of potentially shareable research artefacts (software, research data, preprints or articles, textual corpora, workflows ...). Institutions are interested in better managing these outputs. They are also more interested in showcasing their special collections and archives, often providing more strongly curated discovery through exhibitions. In these cases the focus is inside out, sharing institutional resources with interested parties externally. This contrasts with a more traditional outside-in focus, where the library purchases and licenses materials from external providers and brings them into the local audience. Sometimes, people interpret this to mean that I am saying that an inside-out focus will replace an outside-in focus. I am not saying this, as the latter remains important.

Cover of report about BTAA and collective collection.

Another concept that plays a major role in your vision on the future of libraries is that of the collective collections ...

The network environment plays an essential role in this development. It reduces the interaction costs of collaboration, and facilitates more shared and collaborative approaches. In this context, more libraries are looking at how they might manage the acquisition, management and preservation of collections in collaborative or collective ways. We have seen this with print collections through consortial resource sharing and now shared storage and the movement around shared print. We have seen it with digital collections which may be managed on joint platforms, like DPLA or Europeana for example.

As mentioned above, this focuses on the world of academic libraries. Are the suggested solutions and ideas also usable in other contexts? I am thinking of public libraries, documentation centres, corporate libraries and even archives?

Certainly, although with different emphases. I think that the pandemic has encouraged a growing interest in special collections and their digitization in public libraries, and the desire to share those with others as a way of disclosing the memories and experiences of their communities. We have also

seen some interest in collective collections. Public libraries are also coping with diversification of information resources, looking at streaming video, podcasts and other digital materials, e-books, and so on, where they are facilitating access.

The inside-out focus tends to involve unique or rare materials – faculty research outputs or digitized special collections. This is an important intersection point with archives. In fact, it has been interesting seeing those managing research data and other digital resources think about adopting archival professional practices like appraisal.

A final and hypothetical question. If the library did not exist: would it still be invented in the 21st century?

Well, this is a big question. Yes, the library would be invented anew. I like to focus on the generative role of the library and its support for creation. The Irish writer Seán Ó Faoláin said the following about the National Library of Ireland: "People should think not so much of the books that have gone into the National Library but rather of the books that have come out of it." ■



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