Integration of Information Services into University Infrastructure

A Report about 7th Frankfurt Scientific Symposium from October 12 to October 13 2007

by Elisabeth Simon

The 7th Frankfurt Scientific Symposium – taking place in the beautiful Westend Campus during the Bookfair – carried a well chosen title „Integration of Information Services into the University Infrastructure". This motto met exactly the ongoing discussion during the last time due to several reasons:

1. It was asked how information services have to be shaped in order to fit into the University Infrastructure. The question between the library as a public place and space, as a living room for the students[1] or as Myong Wilson and Farideh Tehrani were describing as „Library Messages beyond the border"[2], giving examples of how the libraries should leave their walls and set off to places where people need the information. – Information services have to be shaped accordingly posing difficult questions to the strategy, the management and the professionals.

2. How do you define the University Infrastructure? Is there at all a possibility or even the necessity to find an overall definition? Certainly this is not possible and will be one of the most important questions which have to be considered when integrating Information Services into the infrastructure of universities or one university.

3. The most important problem which will face the university and their information services might stem from their history in Germany. When electronic services and devices were introduced into university libraries in Germany the whole procedure started with the administration. It was very welcome that the administration of lending and borrowing items experienced support by these services, since university libraries in Germany grew considerably in size and number. This first introduction was followed up by co-coperatives in the different states, whereas the university library of Frankfurt was in the forefront of this development, it was also one of the first by introducing and building up one of the first consortia in Germany.

4. But all in all the picture during this time nearly 30 years ago was in so far similar, that libraries did not try to use the electronic advantages in the first place for a better information services and a line was drawn between electronic carriers and printed ones for information which prevented first considerations and experiences with the integration of information services.

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[1] Ulrich, Paul S. [Ed.] (2006) Die Bibliothek als Öffentlicher Ort und Öffentlicher Raum – The Library as a Public Place and Public Space. Berlin: BibSpider
[2] ibid.

5.   The Library of the Centre Pompidou, now over 30 years ago, was the first library on the European continent which placed the different media according to topic, e.g. it placed videos and slides side on side to the printed item. This was extraordinary and well observed by professionals and all in all a big success for this library which got quite known for setting up an information service which up to this date was not very well shaped in the library world, also not in France, which even developed the historical resources more than in Germany. This might depend on the tradition on library services in Germany and in France likewise, although French libraries had always generally speaking accepted technological advances in a much more positive way than it could usually be observed in Germany.

6.   Although it cannot be easily proven, this has to do with the tradition of German library services – one shall not overlook this cultural structure of long duration. German Libraries were always strong in collection development which can easily be tied to the academic tradition. The academic world, especially the humanities were also strong in bibliographical instructions which resulted from a very thorough academic education but unfortunately this did not develop into a thorough information services, contrary to the USA where the historical base of the information service, which we admire today, was coming partly from experiences of students which had visited German universities at the end of the 19th century. I may only cite an example from the past from my own experience: Having returned from the United States in the sixties after I have been working there for one year I found out that the Public Library system in Hamburg, one of the biggest public library system in Germany, had got rid of its alphabetical subject catalogue which was such a good base to serve as an electronic tool for information services. As far as structure is concerned such catalogue is not so different to Google and even during these times patrons loved alphabetical subject catalogues. But it has to be confessed that it proved a difficult task to keep and update such catalogue during a time which did not know the electronic devices for such a work let alone the space which had to be provided for such catalogues.

There might be easily found some more reasons why this seminar was this important. But the question how to shape present information services to fit into the infrastructure of universities presents the base of most professional discussions today.

The speakers, who came e.g. from the USA (Urbana Champaign, University of Virginia Charlottesville, Library of the State University of Minnesota) and Germany (IKMZ Cottbus, Library TU Munich), Netherlands (Leiden) and Sweden (Lund) were catching the audience by keeping to the topic and not hiding difficulties and obstacles to put this mission into practice. Certainly repositories and their role as a link between academics, students as well professors and researchers took a great deal of the papers presented and discussed. The solutions were very different, the centralised solution of all services was matched by the development of departmental libraries (TFPL "local librarians begin to plan the transformation of library

space") which were working together in a network but – as in former times the institute libraries were on the forefront to the users at the different institutions.

Commonly all papers stressed the problem universities are facing by the gap between funding which generally goes up the 2 % and the real cost which goes up to 4 % by the growing number of students and the growing demands for research, which is becoming increasingly competitive.

All papers presented the search for a strategy, the identification of key issues, to generate support and the creation of professional space. More and more the search for a one stop shop as well for digital library resources and other information material is looked for. The main mission of supporting research demands a new staff mix and is followed by staff issues. Therefore the agenda for the new future demands reorganisation and reallocation – which could be generalised in the motto *from collection building management to facilitation of research learning and teaching*.

All these considerations, ideas and reports from work done in the university libraries were in a way contradicted by the paper copyright and information within academic institutions (by Ruth Maria Bousonville). Although the US copyright law seems to be more friendly to teaching and research by the fair use and faire dealing the audience was told that up to a percentage of 70% use unfettered content . Librarians in Germany are unhappy about the law and hope for a third basket of the law since teaching, learning and research are dependent on an information infrastructure which has to be build up as seamless information which will determine in a way the quality of information. Researchers are increasingly changing their attitude, the illusion of security is frightening them. Students, teachers and researchers have to trust. The digital library is not a storage but presents today an articulated process and procedures into the flow of information and requires new strategies which could define the library as a diffuse agent within the scholarly community. If you realise the mission of German University Libraries of some ages before of being storage of material the overruling mission today be visualised.

On the other hand the papers presented at the conference showed that the problems become increasingly common for all the libraries of the world. Therefore such an international conference and discussion has developed from a stage to get to know each other to the stage of discussion common problems. In this context libraries are advancing quickly in international cooperation thus creating the base for better and more efficient collaboration not only in their own field, but in the international world of science and research.

Jeffrey Garrett, Bernt Dugall and Lindsay Fairhurst shall receive our sincerest thanks for a very interesting and inspiring conference at the University of Frankfurt's Campus Westend.

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3