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Libraries as Repositories of Knowledge: Present and Future

Papers from the 3rd International Conference on the Greek World in Travel Accounts and Maps,
'Knowledge is Power', Meet the Experts Session, 2-4 November 2016, University of Cyprus, Nicosia

***Libraries as Repositories of Knowledge:
Present and Future***

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Introduction: Libraries as Repositories of Knowledge: Present and Future

Filippos Tsimpoglou

The International Scientific Conference ‘Knowledge is Power’ was held in Nicosia at the University of Cyprus on 2-4 November 2016, organised by the Sylvia Ioannou Foundation and the University of Cyprus. When asked by the organisers for an appropriate theme for the Meet the Experts Session of the Conference, I suggested a kind of dialogue about the future of libraries among experts from representative, different library models. The central issue would be an investigation of the way these libraries evaluate their own attitudes towards other kinds of libraries and how each category foresees its coexistence with the other models in the new and evolving internet and digital environment. In order to cover five main library models, we invited one expert from a university library, one from an art and museum library, one from an international digital ‘library’, one from a public library and one from a national library.

Libraries of all categories in our age have been called hybrid, as they combine both print collections and digital ones. We can safely speculate that this hybrid environment will last for many years into the future. Even with different degrees of penetration for each library category, digital and internet material has been embedded in all libraries, in parallel with the traditional printed matter that endures. However, the future library cannot be understood as an isolated institution outside of the environment of other libraries. Every future library should be understood as an active constituent of a world grid of information sources. Thus, the interconnected, interoperating libraries of the future should continue to offer their services. This grid-like operation is a consequence of the advancement of information and communication technologies and the exploitation of them by libraries. It is a product of an inter-thematic and inter-sectoral approach of collaboration among libraries and people, transcending geographical and other material or mind frontiers. Libraries are moving towards a cooperative globalisation in which each one offers its own ‘locality’ in terms of unique or particular assets and features to the global society, each one acting locally but thinking and influencing globally.

Aside from the issue of selecting representative library models, the challenge was to turn five potential monologues, each presented by the representative of each category, into an organised dialogue, so we prepared each speaker before the Conference by asking them to read, compare and comment in advance on the papers written by the other speakers. We invited the participants to consider how different kinds of libraries can cooperate in a globally networked environment and which new roles and activities should be undertaken to complement the current ones. This arrangement helped in stimulating questions and answers that otherwise would not have been unveiled. Thus, five draft papers were written and then sent to all the experts, first to be aware of the issues that were raised by their co-speakers and second to comment on all of them with their own points. This idea was born from the reading of a very special book, *The Study of Information: Interdisciplinary Messages*: ‘Nine lead papers [each one in a different scientific field] and three to five discussion papers for each of

the nine were commissioned. The subsidiary papers were asked to offer critical comments, elaboration, or supplementary observations on the subject of the lead papers. The author of the lead paper would then come back with a rejoinder.’¹

The conference was divided into two main parts, just as these proceedings are arranged. Part I consisted of the presentation of each representative’s library, its mission, target groups, figures and trends or shifts noticed in the particular library, as well as the concept, strategies, approaches, methods, tools and practices followed. The second part consisted of the comments on the papers of the other participants. These raised such subjects as the relations or interconnections of each library with libraries of other categories on such issues as local discoveries of world treasures, digitisation versus digital curation, oral history, information literacy, dissemination of formats, linked open data, fields of collaboration, complementary activities and synergies, as well as thoughts on the threats and challenges to the future of the libraries in each category. There followed questions from the audience, answered by the speakers.

An important matter is that this dialogue should carry on and widen, as not all the issues could be addressed within the duration of a conference; it needs to expand so that further contributions can be made by other actors and stakeholders. Here we identified the limits of the printed form of information and, having in mind that this continuation could be offered by exploiting the features of digital information, we all (organisers, speakers, editors) decided to publish the proceedings in an electronic format, openly accessed online and in a forum where further contributions to the dialogue that started at the Conference could be added by further library categories and stakeholders. Please consult p. 78 for details of how to join in.

1. F. Machlup and U. Mansfield (eds), *The Study of Information: Interdisciplinary Messages*, New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1983, p. xiv.