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You Can't Preserve What You Don't Have—Or Can You? Libraries as Infrastructure for Perpetual Access to Intellectual Output

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Abstract

Since their existence, libraries have been responsible for preserving society's records and intellectual output. This ancient and important role is under serious threat in the digital age. Even for scholarly journals, the issue of perpetual access has not been solved, other than by libraries buying access to archival materials. Recently, it became clear that the open access business model, with a focus on free access to new publications, introduces new problems for the archival role of libraries.

If ownership is crucial for preservation, who will ensure future generations have access to scholarly journal content of past times? Who are the actors in this new environment, and what opportunities can be identified to address this important issue?

Libraries have changed immensely since ancient times. At the same time, libraries have *not* changed at all. Sure, I could see how a Roman citizen would not necessarily recognize the Hunt Library as a library. However, some things about libraries have not changed in over 2,000 years. Today, I would like to focus on the core mission of libraries: To ensure perpetual access to knowledge (mostly documented, written text).

This was the mission of the libraries in Efeze and Alexandria, and it is still our mission today. It may not be the only thing we do, and we might go about it very differently today, but it is still a very important part of our added value to society.

The digital network is the perfect environment to advance access to knowledge. Naturally, we were there from the start of the digital era to identify opportunities and provide better services to our users. Of course, we embrace new technologies to fulfill our mission and add value to society.

At the same time, we should also acknowledge that in some areas networked services of new players are able to replace library services, so our services need to evolve. We need to review critically where we really add value and where this might be less so.

Two years ago, my colleague Coen Wilders addressed this conference on the topic of local discovery. It is our vision in Utrecht that we want to serve our users close to where they are on the digital network and provide access to knowledge within their workflow as seamlessly as possible.

Here are some of these workflows (referring to slide). Over 40% of the traffic to these publishers' content comes through Google and Google Scholar, and we know from another big publisher that this is over 50% both for books and journals.

This is what researchers themselves say. Over 20,000 researchers responded to a survey from two of my colleagues, Bianca Kramer and Jeroen Bosman, on the use of tools on the Internet. You can clearly see how small the role of the library is. Our strategy at Utrecht is to invest less in local discovery services. Rather, we focus on the delivery of the content through the systems our users prefer, for example, Google Scholar.

While libraries may be less important for users to discover knowledge, they are still important to provide access. However, with open access advancing as a publication model, Google digitizing the world's books, and users organizing their own access, the role of libraries for delivery may become less important too.

Will open access become the publishing model of the future? Some believe it will. In the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, golden open access is on the agenda of our national governments and university administrators. Since 2015, in the Netherlands, license negotiations have included demands for open access for publications of Dutch researchers. We focused on eight large publishers. So far, we were successful in six contracts. In these licenses, our communities have access to the content as before, and the publications of Dutch researchers are published immediately in open access by the publishers.

In two licenses, the cost model was flipped: We now pay for the publishing services instead of for reading

rights. This results in a situation where access to current Dutch research is open to the world. Wonderful.

However, in some cases, the publisher negotiated temporary access instead of perpetual access to the content. When I was personally confronted with this during license negotiations last year, it proved difficult to effectively make the case for perpetual access. How to make the case for eternity? To be honest, I may not have done a very good job, for the result was not satisfactory. The contract to be signed will lack perpetual access rights to the content, starting in 2016. Even worse, we do not know for how long this content will be preserved. What we do know is that if publishers are the only ones to be responsible, long-term preservation will depend on commercial interest, and this is just not good enough. No research can be done without access to knowledge, and this includes insights of previous times.

Only a selection can be preserved, not everything. This was always true, and it is still true in the digital era, but perpetual access should be organized by trustworthy organizations that use appropriate criteria that are important for research and ultimately, society. Of course, this is not new. Libraries and other organizations in the public domain have been aware of the need for preservation of digital content from the start of the digital era, including post-cancellation access to commercial content. Many organizations did invest in long-term preservation.

Solutions available today so far include:

- Dark archives.
- Pre-print repositories.
- Archives on CD.
- Archival rights based on goodwill.
- Unclear post-cancellation agreements.
- Reports on evolving collections.
- First steps to change copyright laws to enable archiving.
- Collectively address the issue of rolling back files policies of publishers.

There are promising initiatives too. Several national libraries have already built repositories, including commercial content. Some organizations are

creating infrastructures for open knowledge. They do so with or without other partners. The National Library in my own country, the Netherlands, has been building an e-repository since the 1990s, but this is a dark archive. The French National Digital Library, a project by INIST, is building an archive for long-term preservation including access. It takes a Frenchman to think of keeping content within the national borders, of course, but it is still very useful. There are many more such examples.

There are two questions, though:

1. How do we scale preservation services?

In many cases, initiatives are national projects. Is this sufficient in a world where research is increasingly carried out in international networks?

2. Who are important stakeholders?

Can libraries do this by themselves? Who should they partner with?

In terms of scale, four or five copies of knowledge hubs should be enough. More realistically, a network of preservation hubs might consist of local solutions, connected through standard protocols, but whatever way we do it, if we want to serve our research community, we better collaborate and create *global access to global knowledge*, content that is preserved and available to next generations.

Who should act on this?

First, libraries do not own digital content but can collect it. I must say I never believed in libraries collecting the institution's research output, but it may become necessary. Theoretically, if we all do that, we would effectively be creating this knowledge hub.

The case of open access shows us that if we aspire to make scholarly communication more effective we have to get the business case on the agenda of other stakeholders. After a decade of libraries promoting open access to publications, things only started to change when governments, policymakers and administrators made it a priority on their agenda and when it became part of their business case.

For example, when in my part of the world open access, open data, and now open science became part of the agenda of the European Union, things moved along. Copyright issues are debated, and infrastructures are built.

Here's I think what we should do:

1. Make perpetual access to knowledge the top priority on our agenda. It is at the core of our mission, and society runs a risk. If we don't do it, nobody will.
2. Get perpetual access to knowledge on the agenda of relevant stakeholders as quickly as possible and do it collectively. Certainly, in a world where important stakeholders see the need for open science, we have a huge opportunity.

3. Find partners to develop long-term preservation infrastructures.

Let's contribute to the availability of knowledge to future generations and leave the rest to Google.

Thank you.