Library collections in transition The future of books in libraries

In the last decade, the information environment has undergone a digital revolution and the rate of digital publication has increased exponentially. This has resulted in dramatic changes in academic and public libraries' collections and services. Among librarians we talk about 'the serial crisis' or that a spectre is haunting the publishing industry; it is the ghosts of all the publishers that have disappeared in the last few years because they neglected the electronic media – big publishing houses, which have been absorbed by other more forward-looking publishers. However, while many traditional presses have closed down or have been losing money for years, new publishers are emerging with different business models that encompass electronic developments like e-books, Open Archives, Open Access digital repositories, and Creative Commons.

Anja Møller Rasmussen

THE DIGITAL LIBRARY AS WE KNOW IT TODAY can be traced back to the emergence of electronic journals and the first e-books in the late 1990s. Unlike its print counterpart, however, the online version means that libraries no longer own or control access to the content. Together with the shift in scholarly publishing and reading habits, this shift in control over access and location of content is the biggest challenge to libraries today.

Most of those libraries that are now cancelling print journals in favour of online material and buying e-books instead of print copies have become very concerned about the uncertainty of future access to online collections that could result from publisher mergers, the trading of titles between publishers, and the disappearance of online content due to providers going out of business. This concern highlights libraries' need for secure access and facilities for archiving content regardless of providers. While this concern is addressed in some license negotiations and agreements, the issues remain unresolved.

Owing to the cost of digital publications, libraries that used to spend 50 percent of their acquisitions budgets on printed books and monographs now spend 25 percent or less.

Pricing, budgets and costs
At the same time, libraries are deeply concerned that subscription costs for electronic journals and e-books continue to sky rocket. This price rise has forced libraries into print collection cancellations. It has resulted in huge shifts in the allocation of resources in collection budgets towards increased support for e-journal and e-book packages – a shift that can be read out of the acquisitions budget of every library in the

world and that leaves small libraries without the means to meet the demands of their users. Owing to the cost of digital publications, libraries that used to spend 50 percent of their acquisitions budgets on printed books and monographs now spend 25 percent or less. Thus, in order to meet the growing demand for e-publications and databases, NIAS Library, where we used to spend 40 percent of the budget on printed monographs, now spends less than 18 percent on these books.

The digital library is nowadays taken for granted. Students and researchers demand access 24/7 to e-journals and e-books, and the library must respond to this demand. Simultaneously, libraries have been confronted with budget cuts and demands for more effective management; the answer to these demands has been more electronic material and simplified administrative procedures; more electronic media and fewer printed volumes. Moving and handling paper is expensive and time-consuming work!

Challenged by user demands and economic realties, libraries are set to change into 'libratories', a combination of library, repository and electronic access hub – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Which leaves little space for the traditional printed book in modern library collections.

Academic publishers, who depend on sales to libraries, cannot cover their costs only by publishing printed volumes but must meet the demand for electronic formats to ensure their continued survival. It is actually a very interesting paradox that even with the growth of digital technologies and the ease of utilising these technologies, publishers continue to increase the price of both e-publications and print material, although digitising is more cost-effective for publishers than traditional production (Lewis, 2008). Another paradox is that publishers continue to promote both print and online versions even though this keeps prizes up and is highly undesirable both for libraries and researchers.

Changes in scholarly communication
The global pressure on researchers to 'publish or perish' has increased drastically over the last couple of years with publication output becoming the main path to success in research assessments exercises, job applications and faculty grants. Not only young scholars depend on publishing to advance their careers: all faculty members must publish to ensure grants and academic standing.

However, printed books and journal articles are no longer intrinsically the right means of distributing knowledge. Open Access models, 'license to publish' and creative commons agreements are becoming more and more accepted forms of publishing. Future scholarly publishing will be much influenced by authors' attitudes at the writing stage, and library collection policies will need to change in order to reflect these new developments.

New forms of scholarly communication and Open Access are slowly becoming integral elements of library collection development activities. Many academic and university libraries have already created and implemented action plans for scholarly communications programmes and Open Access repositories, developed in close collaboration with researchers. The current model of commercial publishing of the academic research output is, after 20 years of excessive journal subscription price increases, no longer financially sustainable. Scholars are taking back ownership of their research output by retaining copyright and making their research freely available through 'license to publish' agreements for everyone on the web. Several national research councils and funding institutions now demand that all scholarly works created with their backing must be published as Open Access publications.

Printed books and journal articles are no longer intrinsically the right means of distributing knowledge. Open Access models, 'license to publish' and creative commons agreements are becoming more and more accepted forms of publishing.

This means that today a great amount of research materials and data is available online, and free of charge to the reader. Instead of purchasing or licensing content, some libraries are now devoting their collections budgets to supporting Open Access publishing initiatives, thus acknowledging that the production of knowledge is not free and that the costs must somehow be met. During the last couple of years, new Open Access business models have been developed and hopefully publishers are starting to realise the importance of extending Open Access publishing models to researchers who wish to make their research results freely available to the academic community.

Anja Møller Rasmussen
NIAS Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Library, Denmark
anja.moller.rasmussen@nias.ku.dk

Sources
Darnton, Robert (2008) *Google and Future of Books.* Online at: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/22281 (Last accessed 17.02.2009)
DeMatteo, Stacy (2008) Copyright, Open Access, *Creative Commons: Impact on Library Services and Budget.* Online at http://infosherpas.com/ojs/index.php/openandlibraries/article/view/16/27 (Last accessed 17.02.2009)
Lewis, D.W. (2008) *Library budgets, open access, and the future scholarly communication: transformations in academic publishing,* College and Research Libraries News, p.271-273.

I can't help seeing the first as an attempt at symbolic self-aggrandisement, and the latter as a lazy reading by someone wanting to drag all meaning to a central repository of 'common sense'. But that is the point of a book like this – it is written by editors, and they see things differently to academics. This book is a valuable resource for making scholars aware of the stylistic, cultural and economic requirements of the world of book-publishing. (Also, I am not sure my imaginary super-academic/writer exists, at least I haven't met her yet.)

Production of a single-authored book has become a benchmark of progress in academic careers that is unfairly applied to staff whose expertises lie in other areas of academic achievement.

Nevertheless, by exploring the gap academics must cross in order to compete in the world of scholarly publishing, *Getting Published* is also a contribution to a debate about the benefit of the impregnable position the book occupies beside other forms of academic output: production of a single-authored book has become a benchmark of progress in academic careers that is unfairly applied to staff whose expertises lie in other areas of academic achievement; declining financial resources have seen

university presses compete with non-scholarly presses in producing books for broad readerships, and this trend has made publication difficult for scholars whose work engages with the finer detail of materials outside the public's attention; understaffed university presses routinely seek subsidies that sap resources marked for research and place a question mark over the probity of publication process; and what is wrong with journal articles? It is not clear why a monograph should be a higher token of academic esteem than a refereed journal article in a quality journal.

Although these questions are outside the brief of *Getting Published*, the authors deserve ample credit for not positioning the scholarly monograph as the 'be all and end all' of academic achievement. Instead, they lay out the multiple paths open to scholars in their working life. Jackson and Lenstrup make it clear that publication of a scholarly monograph with an international publisher is not the only trajectory open to scholars. Some of the chapters in *Getting Published* discuss e-publishing, writing and publication of articles, and self-publication. This is a valuable feature of the book, and it acknowledges that the reality of scholarly work is far more varied than the traditional monograph as we know it.

The information contained in *Getting Published* will help writers navigate the strenuous currents of academic publication, and is therefore of use to all academics. To writers contemplating production of a first monograph, this book (or one like it) is essential preparation.

Julian Millie
School of Political and Social Inquiry,
Monash University, Australia
julian.millie@arts.monash.edu.au