



Collection development in the digital age

Klaus Kempf

At the beginning of modern librarianship, in the early modern period, at the time of the Kunst- and Wunderkammern, the so-called cabinets of curiosities, the common origin of libraries and museums, the library has still been equated with the term "collection" and vice versa. Back then it has already been an integral part of library collections that those were compiled with sustainability in mind and were aimed at the public, although this was restricted. The latter was the reason for the introduction of a rigid organization for the collection objects which turned the mere accumulation of books into an organized entity, thus facilitated their presentation and use, and foremost let them become an institution, the "library". It is important to be aware of those basic aspects of library collections, if one would like to understand, what changes have happened especially in the last two decades with the rise and triumph of digital information as well as with the invention of the Internet and with the libraries.

Today in the age of the so-called "hybrid library" that hosts in its collection printed resources as well as digital resources under on (real and virtual) roof, the libraries foremost have to develop a coherent service concept taking into account the media break. They have come under enormous pressure from the demand side as well



as from the supply side. On the one hand the users with their information behaviour have emancipated themselves from the library and its role as information intermediary. On the other hand the information and media market is, due to the Internet, predominated by a very strong competition. The newcomer on the market, the commercial information providers, the search engine operators such as Google and others, as well as a worldwide operating Internet bookstore such as Amazon are developing constantly new attractive offers. To fairly keep pace with this development, libraries have to make a change of course, better even a paradigm shift in their traditional service concept: They do not act foremost collection- or media-orientated anymore, but based on the concrete user needs they try to fulfil these at the best. In this framework the provision of the library holdings is no longer the priority, but only one of the possible service options. The own collection and the local collection development still do not have become obsolete, but the concept as well as the content of the collection have to be redefined. From now on the library collection also includes licensed resources, as well as resources free available on the Internet, so-called open access information resources. Cooperation plays an increasingly important role in the acquisition (keyword: consortia) as well as in collection development. Division of labour considering costs as well service factors is generally the guiding principle and today it is more important than ever before. The consequence however is, that the collections of libraries that are engaged in a consortium – and by now this is the majority of them – become more and more homogeneous, this means upon reversion that the collection as distinctive characteristic of a library, or even as the unique selling proposition will become less and less important. Next to the cooperation phenomenon the aspects of the presentation of holdings, of access to those holdings and the visualisation of the media offer – as for example the setup

of virtual subject libraries (ViFas) based on search engines, similar to Google etc. – have gained a greater significance than they had in a yesterdays world of only printed media.

So what will the future bring for libraries and their collections of tomorrow? Facing the ongoing rapidly progressing development of information and communication technology and the just emerging virtualization of the research infrastructure that will in turn strongly influence the information and communication behaviour of the individual researcher, the look into even the nearest future is complicated by significant elements of uncertainty especially for such a specific question. An attempt of a prudent prognosis will nevertheless be made: The future library world will consist of contrasts on the one hand and division of labour on the other hand. We will be witnesses, especially in the field of collection characteristics, of an almost merciless differentiation, or even selection of libraries regarding the institutional-specialist aspects. In the all-digital-world of tomorrow the topic collection development in the classic sense, this means the establishment and expansion as well as the maintenance of collections as comprehensive as possible, more and more compromised of mostly genuine online information resources, some of them possibly free accessible over the Internet as open access publications, will play a significant role only for a few, selected, large-scale and high-performance libraries. Those will nevertheless cooperate worldwide and especially cross-divisional, this means together with other memory institutions, such as (also selected) archives and/or museums, and will work on for example specialist collections of relevant digital objects. The vast majority of scientific libraries in contrast will restrict themselves to more modest collections than they have today and will adjust this local "online core collection" strictly to the actual basic needs of their users. For unusual information needs the "comprehensive collections" described above will come

into play as a *lender of last resort*. Also smaller libraries however can play an active part in a completely networked world through locally produced (digital) document and object collections that possibly have unique character and are preserved in the respective institutional and/or local subject repositories, and thus contribute their specific addition to the forming, geographically and institutionally distributed "digital world memory".

A reorientation of the collection policies could last but not least be relevant in the framework of the establishment of so-called virtual research environments especially for data-intensive research projects. Here an extension or even a change of the concept of collection objects would take place. The main focus would not lie, as it usually has been, on documents of whatever kind, at best a publication or similar Internet resource, but their place is more and more taken by primary research data in previously unknown magnitude and complexity. Collecting data however is in this context only a small proportion of a conceivable, new librarian "service package", that, tailored to each particular case, will include the development and the use of metadata schemes, research documentation, (online-) publications published according to open access or open science concepts and last but not least the long-term preservation of the collection objects including the associated metadata and possible further secondary information. For libraries that define themselves as an integral part of the infrastructure of a modern scientific community or even better as functional partner of the researchers, this is a very demanding new challenge, but definitely worthwhile and strongly capable of development. This basic, almost revolutionary reorientation anyway is surely not a panacea for every library and certainly not a guarantee for the survival as institution.

We have thus (for now) come full circle. The view from the early modern period up to the information world of tomorrow shows,

how the understanding of objects collected in a library and with this the understanding of what a library is, can change, without abandoning certain fundamental principles or values. Concerning the librarian activity of collecting this means, that regardless of the collection object – yesterday the printed book, today the digital *content*, in any form whatsoever – the aspects of organization and visualization or presentation in the sense of “providing access” are always implied and remain the constants of the librarian work. This, incidentally, the libraries had in common with the cabinet of curiosities. Due to the Internet or, more precisely, the WWW as the worldwide information and communication platform, those aspects, which have literally been out of sight, this means disappeared from the library magazines, undergo a renaissance. The new digital collection objects – similar to the books in a baroque library hall – have to be made directly visible and should be accessible immediately. In this context once again, as already during the early days of modern librarianship, at the time of the cabinet of curiosities, a specific form of indexing, a kind of “spatial organization” of collection objects comes into play. This time though it is not the architecturally closed space, which is supposed to make the books, presented systematically and according to a specific, given organization, as visible as possible and thus accessible, but it is the infinite space of the Internet with its seemingly unlimited possibilities to “stage” information in a way, that the user can “climb through” to the needed or offered information as conveniently and as directly as possible. Google has set standards also in this context. The search engine giant has, in the opinion of some art and media experts, on the one hand created an icon of the 21. Century with its – commercial-free – front page only determined by the company name and the search field and one the other hand brought about a revival of the cabinet of curiosities in a new appearance:

«Brilliant software programmers like the Google founders are the creators of today's digital wunderkammer. They create an endless number of possibilities for the global storage, networking and representation of knowledge» (Burda182).

Whether or not Google is recognised as the significant originator of the design of the new, the virtual world, it can be stated with Bredekamp, that the drawing on the idea of the cabinet of curiosities, this means the here included concepts of the organization and presentation of knowledge as well as their application to the flood of images and information caused by the digital media,

«involves for the users or viewers a training of visual association and mental processes, that run ahead of the language systems, ... (Bredekamp102)

And (on the other hand) – as Anke Te Heesen states – doubtlessly ... the adaptation of the principles of the cabinet of curiosities, also "tames" the chaos of objects, which our today's disciplinary thinking considers as separated, to an aesthetically appealing and calming order of things» (Heesen and Spary7-21).

Bredekamp once more:

«The high-technology societies are going through a phase of a Copernican revolution from the dominance of language (and of text; K.K.) to the hegemony of the image» (Bredekamp102).

The libraries with their collections are an integral part of this newly forming virtual world. Their collections – from now on in digital form – continue to exist in the larger collections of the new "digital cabinet of curiosities". In this respect libraries are and will always remain also collections, no matter what institutional fate they will take.

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KLAUS KEMPF, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München.
kempf@bsb-muenchen.de

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ABSTRACT: The present essay, shows the collection development in the digital age and the changes occurred in recent decades with the rise of Internet and "hybrid library". Today, in digital age the libraries must be able to meet the real needs of users, working for a great collaboration and cooperation in building and managing online digitized collections, as well as taking care and resize their traditional concept of service.

KEYWORDS: Collections; Digital age; Libraries; Wunderkammern; Search engines.

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