

Keynote Address

Serials: The European Perspective

Jolanda L. von Hagen,
Springer-Verlag

Abstract

The growth of scientific information continues unabated. This growth leads to increased publications in existing and newly founded journals. It has strained the capacities of libraries, bibliographers, distributors and readers alike. The present economic situation is that progressively less literature is being acquired by libraries.

Are books and journals in print format endangered species? Science does not stop. Interaction between science and society is needed for actual and economic development. Publishers, scientists and librarians are in search of new scholarly communication systems. High investments, productive creativity and close co-operation between all parties concerned worldwide are needed to succeed. European unification and the elimination of trade barriers will strengthen research capacities and increase the pool of knowledge. More information will be made available.

While universities, libraries and publishers invest in new information storing and transfer systems for the future, the present needs to be managed.

To start off a very professional and workshop oriented programme is always a difficult task. To do so with only experts in attendance and to talk about a topic where only a crystal ball could help, makes it even more difficult.

The fact that the UK Serials Group organised this "European Conference", should stimulate a positive potential for a unified European collaboration. For centuries, librarians and publishers have existed next to each other; librarians have quietly and proudly observed the success of their faculties in research findings and responsibly made all information available to faculty and students to further their knowledge. Publishers have served that same faculty as literary

agents, editors and producers; they have sorted and presented - proudly - those ideas, findings and philosophies in books and journals. By and large, however, publishers and librarians have stayed away from each other. Only when problems arise and only in the last decade have we realized our joint responsibility to that same clientele.

As many of you know, for a number of years some of my colleagues in publishing and I have tried to establish a dialogue with librarians at large and academic and serials librarians in particular to discuss and evaluate issues of common interest to publishers and librarians.

I am, therefore, very pleased and feel honoured and privileged that the organisers of the conference have invited me to share and review with you some thoughts, fears, facts and fantasies that one representative of one STM publisher contemplates when looking ahead in time and towards a united Europe beginning in 1992, or now, or later. It can only be a stroke of the brush and a broad look at the presence and foreseeable future.

Your programme will pick up in detail on the questions and perspectives. Fact is, and it will remain so in the future, that interaction between science and society has become an integrated part of every day life. Science will not stop, it will provide solutions and create new problems. Scientific research and findings need to be recorded and documented. In some cases means other than publishing in printed form are available.

I would like to come back to that later.

Fact is, the growth of scientific information continues. This growth leads to increased publications in existing and newly founded journals in which ever format. It has strained the capacities of libraries, bibliographers, distributors and readers alike. The present economic situation is that progressively less literature is being acquired by libraries.

Here we seem to enter the vicious circle: libraries do not acquire literature for their research and educational communities, they deprive faculties

and students of access to the information needed to study, learn and do their research.¹

Who, how and when can and will information produced by ever increasing funding for research projects be disseminated to provide knowledge and avoid duplication? Scientists will have the greatest problem because they will have to produce more information.

Balancing library budgets by cancelling existing serials to buy new ones cannot be the answer. In this desperate and seemingly hopeless situation much time and energy has been spent talking about and disagreeing on prices and pricing policies by some - or as late - all STM publishers. Deana Astle and Charles Hamaker have excellently researched and eloquently presented the pricing issues in the 1930's and the 1980's.²

The ARL report has added confusion to the issue and created more ill-will among the parties than it presented answers. By no means do I want to suggest that we always had and will continue to have pricing problems and let's forget it and move on. I would, however, like to see it move into real life perspectives. You will discuss this topic in detail tomorrow.

The two aforementioned reports as well as many other articles from librarians and, last but not least, the IFLA questionnaire on pricing and dual prices have increased the awareness among librarians and publishers that much more communication is needed if an understanding of all aspects in journal or serials publishing leading to pricing can be achieved.

Let me once again state the obvious: the overall world monetary situation with unpredictable currency fluctuations has largely contributed to price rises of foreign publications. It has created havoc with library budgets and is still not easily explained when speaking with university administrators. Maybe I am naive, but I do believe that by now it has been noted and accepted by most librarians that a UK, Dutch, a US or a German publisher cannot be held responsible for its country's currency fluctuation. That does not solve the problem but it shows the real price increase in original currencies.

What may still need further explanation is that publishers cannot give a special consideration to countries with troubled or weak currencies. We would then be right back to where we would not want to be - namely dual pricing. Many STM publishers are investing alternative publishing and pricing methods to bring the cost of journals down.

The confrontation over the pricing issue seems to have created a number of different factions and schools of thought among librarians. Let me name but two:

1. As advocated by Sharon J. Rogers and Charlene S. Hurt: *How Scholarly Communication Should Work in the 21st Century*.³

There the opinion is stated that "scholarly journals are obsolete as the primary vehicle for scholarly communication". A new system should be implemented and funded with the money now spent on subscriptions. The article is published in the "Chronicle of Higher Education" in October 1989 and is worth reading. No solution is offered how to continue to make information available while this system is being developed or how, indeed, the information is stored while there is no system and all money flows into the development.

The system however, will establish and enforce standards for the formats used for storing data. It does not identify whether it will be coordinated and integrated worldwide. I would not like to sound nor am I really defensive when I say that with this system publishers should also become obsolete.

I am inclined to agree that many aspects of traditional publishing will have become obsolete by the beginning of 21st Century simply because the information transfer and, therefore, distribution channels will have changed the structure and organisation of the publishing industry as a whole. At the same time the library environment will also undergo dramatic changes.

As another alternative to commercial publishers, an article entitled "Scholarly Publishing in the NREN" suggests that it is better to "start from scratch" than be inhibited by "old modes of viewing and doing publishing". The article also states that "massive government support challenges to be creative in planning for the national distribution and availability of information. In light of the primary emphasis on information transfer *publishing ought to be the most important activity developed on the network*". It continues to say "Today's publishers barely have expertise in electronic publishing let alone publishing in a network. Thus we start with nothing".

We know that EUREN and the network of the German Research Council are already "publishing".

I am deeply concerned when I read such sweeping statements. To my knowledge there is also quite some expertise in electronic publishing

and networking in companies such as McGraw-Hill, Elsevier, MacMillan and some others. Much money has been spent. Why not get together with these institutions and publishers to discuss common problems that do not "jeopardize the scholarly process and access to research results".⁴

That leads me to one other school of thoughts as an example:

2. Librarians of large and not so large institutions and publishers of various sizes concerned about the present situation and also seriously interested in finding an answer to the present problems are getting together and openly share internal and, therefore, guarded information.

For nearly 20 years now librarians and publishers have been involved and concerned with the development of new technologies, such as CD ROM, databases, networks and networking, to name just a few. After huge investments on both sides, we are still concerned and involved with the development and improvement of these same technologies and getting into new ones. The aim and goal remains the same: faster, better and ultimately cheaper process and dissemination of information.

How far are we from reaching this goal? Is there a common denominator between us? Are publishers sharing their plans with librarians and do they understand their needs? And in turn, are librarians open to publishers to review new technology developments in their academic environment?

I am not naive enough to believe that we will join in brotherhood and embrace each other wholeheartedly. I do believe, however, that it is necessary for us to recognize each others distinct role in the information transfer today.

We are information brokers and in coordinating distribution channels for all information and according to the users needs, we do not have to sell out to each other or give away all the trade secrets. In the past, publishers have looked at their competitors first to better see realities. The economic realities of publishing in the 1990's are difficult to access, simply because we don't know all our competitors any longer. A telephone company, a database developer or a government agency may be much closer to offering information transfer through new technologies than any of the STM publishers or, indeed, any of the alternative sources within academia indicated by the various reports and proposals. And you know better than anyone, how varied and indeed different the

individual institutions and libraries view and implement new technologies, working tools and rules to abide by.

By attending the "First European Conference on Networking" in Brussels in May, I learned of the vast variety of systems developed. There will be the most sophisticated system at the Bibliotheque de France, and there are still libraries in Europe operating as warehouse for passive objects. There seems to be no co-operation between the two.

Equally uncoordinated have been, and to some extent still are, the developments in the publishing industry.

It took ten years and a lot of money to finally bring to the market the ADONIS systems.

This experiment has proven that publishers can work together without internal interference. And recently a number of publishers have joined forces with typesetters and databank hosts to develop and agree on standards SGML for the scientific information transfer as well as technical production of journals. To achieve implementation of these standards requires high investments, expert knowledge and the ability to work with authors to follow the guidelines submitted.

How, you may well ask, does that influence a European perspective?

All of it applies to Europe as to any part of the world. While the unification of European countries will lead to integration, standardization and co-operative actions on many levels and in many segments of society, some of the joint forces may - as far as information dissemination is concerned - also lead to more problems in immediate terms for scientists, librarians and publishers. As mentioned before, efforts are underway to form a European Library Association to guide and direct libraries to record and document their holdings and to better share their resources.

At the same time scientists are planning and establishing "European Societies" for their individual scientific disciplines. These organisations will, at least for the time being and for the foreseeable future, operate next to and in addition to the already existing National Societies. Both will have political ambitions to take an important place in European scientific developments. (It is conceivable that National Societies will merge into the larger European groupings in the longer term.)

The National Societies will continue to focus on information and training activities in their local language regardless of whether they publish books

or journals directly or have a commercial enterprise publish for them.

National languages and cultures will prevail. It will be the European Societies that take on or expand into new activities. Will this mean that these huge membership organisations have sufficient financing to start their own publishing programmes? Or will they, as so many national and international societies do, employ the services of commercial publishers to ascertain quality publishing and worldwide distribution?

More information will be made available. What impact will it have on scientists and academicians as readers or librarians and publishers as brokers? Research and information in science, technology, and medicine have travelled across borders for many years. Will unification lead to a "European Science Foundation" with more funding for research on a global level and more pressure to publish? How will we cope?

Much of the basic research findings might and are directly keyed-in to databases and be made retrievable as abstracts. But a researcher needs the full text, date and place of the entry to learn and apply the knowledge. Full text is not available for retrieval. As mentioned before we can, and increasingly will, use technology to electronically store and sort information. But someone will have to make the intellectual decision beforehand. The refereeing system will have to be in place to act as "quality control". At present, the quality of illustration and picture information retrievable from databases is neither satisfactory nor acceptable when printed. Therefore, science and medicine in particular have to rely on the printed form for information transfer. Publishers, or societies or, indeed universities or their presses will produce more books and journals. Will libraries partake in the distribution of funds for more research in order to make the information available within their institutions? Will they get a piece of the money from the "European Science Foundation"? Are funds now made available to libraries by the National Science Foundations such as INSERM or the German Research Council (DFG)? If not available now, these avenues should be an probably are explored.

A unified Europe or the unification in the near future already now draws foreign investors, mainly Japanese and Americans, to our continent. Some will participate in our part of the economy - information transfer, publishing in all forms and formats.

There seems to be a run on Europe - like:

Euro-Fever - everyone is hot about it
Euro-Fantasy - think of the 320 million people market

or

Euro-Boredom - the British couldn't care less about it

We don't know what the realities of border free trade will be. We know, it will be easier and faster. We don't know how VAT will be regulated or will it be abandoned altogether? What other taxes will be levied to make up the shortfalls for the governments that now charge VAT? Will we, indeed have one currency? It will be easier to travel. If we are willing to learn the languages and grammar, can we also quickly learn the culture?

As I said in the beginning, I can only share my thoughts and fears and fantasies. I can only point to and raise many questions. I am thoroughly convinced that the answers for publishers and librarians can and must be found together. The changes and transitions that we see today are not limited to the publishing industry or the library community but are part of a historic transformation of which we are now feeling the impact. We have served the past and now are inescapably involved in developing the non-primitive future. To understand our roles, we need to see the cultural ecology which evolves through time.⁵ While grand ideas have emerged and must be further explored, developed and implemented, we will learn through trial and error and we must not lose sight of the presence. □

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