

Towards a Networked National Library

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ABSTRACT

As a consequence of developments in information technology, libraries are more than ever confronted with new threats and opportunities. This concerns national libraries, as well as public libraries and university libraries. Services and logistical processes are to be redesigned, but also the role of libraries in society comes under scrutiny. From a social and political point of view, one might argue that libraries are needed more than ever, but as information becomes digitally available, this is far from evident for all those responsible for the libraries' sustainability. National libraries have a special position, not only within the library sector but also in society, in their own right as well as on behalf of the library sector. This is even more true in the information society. After a short overview of the history of national libraries, the article describes a number of relevant trends in the information society that affects libraries and considers the medium-term consequences, especially for the national library, its role in the library world and within the modern society. Finally, a more speculative long-term vision on national libraries as networked organizations is presented, not as a blueprint, but as a guiding perspective for decisions about national infrastructure.

A SHORT HISTORY OF NATIONAL LIBRARIES UNTIL THE 1990s

National libraries go back a long way. An excellent overview of their development until the mid-1980s is given by Humphries (1988). He distinguishes three stages in their development:

- the autarchic library: the original model of a large independent, self-sufficient store of materials;
- the cooperative library: the new spirit of cooperation in the country's library services from 1958 onwards;
- the librarian's library: the national library as the centre of a national information network to which it makes its own creative contribution (the situation in the 1980s).

The Autarchic Library

There are two difficulties in trying to define a national library: the diverse origins and nature of national libraries throughout the world, and the isolation of a national library from its readers in the sense that it has no single clearly identifiable clientele.

In Britain Antonio Panizzi formulated a vision of what constituted a national library which also had a pervading influence on the attitudes to a national library in other countries. From 1856 until 1866 he was principle librarian of the The British Museum library which was, in fact, the national library of the United Kingdom in all but name. The focus was most particularly on British works and on works relating to the British Empire. With respect to foreign literature, arts and science, the library sought to possess the best editions of standard works for critical purposes or for use. Moreover, the public had a right to find in their national library important foreign works.

In a number of other European countries, royal libraries were taken over to form the national library. In many countries a legal deposit was introduced.

Outside Europe, new national libraries were established on the pattern of older foundations, but without the basis of an initial library. In the US the basis was formed by the Library of Congress, originally intended for the use by members of Congress.

In general, national libraries developed as responsibilities of the state which provided funds for their activities. They were open to public although there were certain exclusions. With the aid of a legal deposit, they collected the nation's publications and many libraries built up a collection of foreign literature.

The occasion for the establishment of the national library was often a political event, frequently the achievement of the country's independence. Libraries were a particularly important element in the cultural heritage, focusing the people's attention on their national identity.

Many national libraries, until after the second world war, were islands in themselves and were little concerned with other libraries and library activities outside their walls.

The cooperative library

After the second world war there was increasing criticism on the traditional national library. For instance, during the UNESCO seminar on national libraries in Vienna in 1958, there was a call for cooperation on the national level: "The national library should be the prime mover in library matters and should be expected to be the leading library in all fields. The national librarian, too, should play a role in all the systematic planning of a country's library services." (Humphreys, 1966, p.169).

The national library must not only be the stockpile of the records of the country's heritage, but also the driving force for the library profession towards technical and social progress. The purpose of a legal deposit should be (Lunn, 1981):

- the accumulation and preservation of a national collection of library materials of all kinds;
- to register the material in a bibliographical publication;
- to make the material available for consultation by those with a reasonable need.

It became generally accepted that every country should have a national bibliographic agency, usually an integral part of the national library. Furthermore, in many countries the law of legal deposit was changed in order to establish also a national collection of audio-visual materials. In the early years of discussion of the function of a national library, the collection of foreign publications was considered an essential element. As book production increased almost explosively, the desirability of encyclopaedic collections was questioned. Most national libraries confined these activities to the humanities. National libraries, therefore, became dependent on other collections nationally or regionally. Related to the sharing of acquisitions they were confronted with the problem of storage and as a consequence cheap storage areas were established.

In general, a national library was considered to have a duty to ensure the preservation of its own collection, especially the national imprints. Also it was expected to conduct or sponsor research in librarianship. Some national libraries have focused on the book as a museum object.

In most countries the national library does not have a legally authorized responsibility for all other libraries. Often the strength of public and academic libraries is such that the national library cannot impose any planned system upon them. The only alternative, then, is cooperation on a voluntary basis.

The librarian's library

In the third stage of growth, it became the task of the national library to be the 'prime mover' in all schemes concerned with the availability of information for any citizen.

One question that must be answered by each national library is: does it exist as a library of first or last resort? With financial pressure on libraries generally, it may be necessary to limit access to accredited scholars only and to introduce a charge for others.

The fundamental function of a national library is the collection, processing and maintenance of the nation's publications and provision of access to them. However, there is a question whether it can afford to retain all published material, cataloguing and housing it. So it may be necessary to restrict collection to 'all significant publications' and to divert some material to other libraries prepared to accept this responsibility as outliers of the national library.

A key factor in the development of library services became the role of the national library in a nation's library system. The precise form and content of the national information system varies in different countries, but coordination of all its elements was formulated by UNESCO as a general goal.

Cooperation rather than coordination is vital, as is the creation of networks connecting the national library with regional or individual libraries. It is desirable that the national library should be on good terms with other libraries of the country and maintains a close relation with library and information associations.

In this context, it is essential in all countries that the collections and services of the national library should be seen as a national resource and that all libraries could make use of its services and on the other hand supplement them.

Gradually it became an issue whether, in the future, national libraries will be less concerned with readers' needs and will concentrate their resources on acting as centres for information, so becoming, in truth, librarian's libraries.

THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The information revolution

Since the 1980s, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) has had a huge impact on society and is, therefore, highly relevant for the future role of not only national libraries, but of all libraries.

Already in the 1970s, libraries were confronted with ICT. These developments, often referred to as automation, may correctly have been considered to be a major change and improvement for both libraries staff and patrons, but in fact what happened was merely an automation of existing processes. Nonetheless, the automated catalogue in particular significantly improved the accessibility of collections.

With increasing use of internet, we are confronted with developments that may without doubt be characterized as a revolution. In libraries primary information has become digitally available and also back-office processes are being redesigned, not at least because of the availability of cloud computing. Combined catalogues, national union catalogues, and international catalogues such as WorldCat are radically improving the accessibility of metadata of collections; gradually also the content itself is becoming available anytime, anywhere, although license restrictions may seriously limit the audience.

When we look to the future, there are an ever increasing number of publications on what technology can do for us, how we can use technology to improve our lives, how technology can take over (routine) tasks. Sometimes these publications and presentations even tend towards science fiction. More relevant for libraries, however, is the influence that the ICT developments have on us as human beings, on our relations with each other and on the way we shape and interact with the world. These changes are far-reaching and pervade all aspects of society. The internet is sometimes considered as if it were an organization you can choose freely to sign up to or not, while life still continues in a regular way independent of this choice. This is far from true. To get an impression of these major changes for communication,

education, economy, politics, we can look at ‘Generation Z’, born after 2001. To them, the world has always been wireless. They may not conceive of life outside the infosphere, because it is progressively absorbing any other reality. This, by the way, may very well imply a real danger of a digital divide, generating new forms of discrimination.

In brief, the dominance of ICT gradually makes us think about the world informationally and makes the world we experience informational. The digital/online world is spilling over into the analogue/offline world and merging with it: the distinction between online and offline will disappear.

I will consider a number of aspects of this revolution that have serious impact for the future of libraries and their role in society (Floridi, 2014).

The information chain

Through the information revolution, many traditional concepts, definitions and/or borders are shifting or disappearing. This concerns library services, but also teaching, research, journalism, publishing, and many other processes for which information is, or is becoming crucial.

The information chain may be defined as an infrastructure consisting of a chain of groups which each fulfil one or more functions in the process of information supply. It describes the processes and roles of parties involved in these processes, from the production to the consumption of information.

In the traditional information chain, the main functions - i.e. the production, distribution, acquisition and consumption of information - were always accommodated in strictly separated stages, connected to well defined parties such as the publisher, the bookseller and the library. However, the configuration of functions within the information chain is changing, and within this changing constellation all the parties involved are struggling to determine their positions, while also new parties are getting involved which do not fit in the traditional scheme.

Let us, for instance, look more closely at the publisher's role. The publisher's main function used to be the distribution of information. Traditionally, the publisher has been engaged in the specific activities of gathering, quality control, registration and dissemination. The publisher's added value has chiefly been in certification and distribution. But in the digital world the costs of reproduction tend to be negligible: distribution becomes ‘digital by default’, because it is not just cheaper but also simpler, clearer and faster. When we look at scholarly communication, the communication about research results is to a considerable extent taking place outside the publisher's sphere. There is growing criticism of the traditional business model for scholarly journals with its central role for the transfer of copyright and subscriptions. New business models are being introduced and Open Access models, in which the reader has free rights to access and reuse the information, are gaining importance (see, for instance, Suber, 2012). As a consequence, to put it simply, it has become easier and less risky to be a publisher and several libraries are engaging in publishing activities. On the other hand, we can observe that some publishers are trying to offer their information and added-value services directly to the end-user, without the intermediary role of the library.

But other boundaries are blurring as well. Often the core business of a library is to serve directly primary processes that are information intensive, for example university libraries serving education and research. Because of the influence of ICT, the relation between the library and these primary processes has changed. There used to be a clear distinction between the transfer of information by a teacher to the student and the provision of information by the library. Since this distinction is blurring, library services are more and more integrated into the educational process. More or less the same is happening with research, where the identification of relevant sources, communication with colleagues, interpretation and analysis of data and the dissemination of results are integrated elements of the research process with no

clear distinction to the traditional role of the library. The library is integrated seamlessly in these processes, 'in the flow' of the user of the services. In the past people were prepared to build their workflow around library systems. But now the library must be prepared to build its services around people's workflows (Varnum, 2014).

The future memory

It has been estimated that humanity had accumulated approximately 12 exabytes of data (1 exabyte = 10^{18} byte) in the course of history until the commodification of computers, and that it had reached 180 exabytes by 2006 (Lyman & Varian, 2003). According to a more recent study (Ganz & Reinsel, 2011), the total grew to over 1,600 exabytes in 2011, and we will have 8 zettabytes in 2015 (1 zettabyte = 10^{21} byte). It can also be shown that since 2007 the world is producing many more data than can be preserved in the available storage. This will have serious implications for the knowledge that future generations can have about our present, i.e. their past.

Information may be considered as an answered question: a person has a question and has also the answer. We may speak of uncertainty when a person has a question without an answer. A person is ignorant when he or she has neither access to the question nor the answer: he or she does not even know that he/she does not know.

Uncertainty is a matter of power, power being the sociopolitical ability to control or influence people's behaviour. In liberal societies, power is exercised about which questions can be asked and what answers can be received. Power in mature information societies is not just about things ('documents') or information about things, but about uncertainty. Who controls the questions, shapes the answers and who shapes the answers controls reality.

Memory is not merely storage and efficient management, but also careful curation of significant differences and hence of the stable sedimentation of the past as an ordered series of changes. With the amount of data being produced we run the risk that differences and alternatives are erased and the past is constantly rewritten, history being reduced to a perennial here and now. The job of the curator, therefore, is bound to become ever more important.

Currently, economic agents have acquired sociopolitical power by controlling the politics of uncertainty in two steps: by making their digital services free through advertisement, and by transforming advertisement from being answers without questions to being answers that generate posthoc relevant questions.

Libraries could, or should, take the role of counterbalancing the power to control people's behaviour through uncertainty, in other words: to guarantee and facilitate the free and effective formulation of questions.

Community building

ICT enables and promotes the building of communities around shared interests. Information sharing within these communities establishes and maintains both identity and cohesion. These shared interests may be of all sorts: a professional group, a group with a shared hobby, patient groups, but certainly also political communities.

An interesting example can be found in the role of the state. The state has arisen as *the* information agent, which legislates on, and at least tries to control, the technological means involved in the information life-cycle, including education, taxes, laws, press and intelligence. Since the second world war, organizations and institutions that are not states, but rather non-governmental multi-agent systems, have been openly acknowledged to act as major influential forces on the political and economic scene internationally, dealing with global problems through global politics. Today we know that global problems cannot rely on sovereign states

as the only source of a solution, because they involve and require global agents. The state is no longer the only or even the main agent in the political arena.

In general, ICT fluidizes the topology of politics, on an international scale, but also within a nation. In fact, ICT enables and promotes the agile, temporary, and timely aggregation, disaggregation, and reaggregation of distributed groups on demand, around shared interests. Changes in power, geography, and organization reshape the debate on democracy.

The development of communities arising and disappearing, independent of geography and traditional forms of organization, is contrasted by the fact that in most countries the library sector is financed and organized 'locally': public libraries by municipalities, research and school libraries by their institutions and, of course, national libraries by countries. All these libraries are rather reluctant to serve users outside their traditional community. This is still reinforced by the perceived dichotomy of physical and digital libraries by many libraries, which observe a threat in the growth of the digital library services and put their main efforts in the usage of their physical space.

While new communities are more and more organized in other than geographic ways they will hardly be served by any library. Currently, the digital collections from one library sector are not accessible for the users from other sectors, or only under conditions that are a considerable inconvenience or expense. This contrast creates a serious threat to the role of libraries, since the identity and cohesion of the communities are established and maintained mainly through information, and the importance of these communities is growing rapidly.

The cultural heritage sector

In most countries there is a division of roles between the various cultural heritage institutions: libraries, archives, data centres, institutes for audiovisual material, museums. The borders that define the distribution of tasks are determined by traditional concepts and definitions. For instance, the definition of 'a publication' is crucial in the division of tasks between libraries and archives, in which publications are the domain of libraries.

There are several definitions of publications in use within the library world, conceptual as well as practical. For books, often the presence of an ISBN number plays a crucial role. But what if a book is digital and has moving images, and/or sound integrated in it? What if a scientific publication has incorporated data, not as an annex but integrated, as an annotated data model? Whose responsibility is it to collect such an item? Should the library set up an additional infrastructure for the storage and preservation of books with multimedia elements, or for the data that are an integral part of a scientific article? This does seem far from obvious, simply because of the costs involved. And who collects websites, blogs and tweets that do not fall within the traditional definitions? Is this a library task, or an archival one?

These questions cannot be answered by referring to traditional definitions. There may be new definitions but, on the other hand, reality might be too fluid for fixed definitions. Therefore, cooperation is needed in ways other than traditional.

THE FUTURE FOR NATIONAL LIBRARIES

Historically seen, the core business of a national library is to collect, to preserve and to provide access to the national imprint. Gradually, national libraries also became the 'prime mover' in schemes concerned with the availability of information for all citizens.

Let us now consider what the implications of the information revolution are for the role of national libraries in society for the coming years. While this role, to a certain extent, is related to developments in the library sector in general, I will start with a number of observations about their future role.

Public and university libraries: the need for stronger co-operation

Let us consider the public libraries and university libraries, being the libraries that are the most visible and most expensive.

Since January 2015, there has been a Public Library Act in The Netherlands which gives an adequate description of the tasks of a public library (Bussemaker et al., 2014), and can be recognised in other countries as well:

- providing knowledge and information;
- offering possibilities for education and personal development;
- advancement of reading and of acquaintance with literature;
- organizing of meetings and debate;
- introducing art and culture.

All these tasks are influenced by the information revolution, especially that of providing knowledge and information; this may be seen as the core task of the public library, playing an essential role in providing citizens with the possibility to act responsibly in a democratic society. But for all of these tasks the digital and the physical facilities and services are complimentary to each other. The extent to which the alternatives are actually used, depends on the individual preferences of the user. The digital aspects of these task call for a national infrastructure for reasons of cooperation and efficiency, which of course can be complemented by local additions.

Public libraries are financed by municipalities, and despite the different forms of cooperation on a regional and/or national level, they mostly have a strong focus on the local community with an important role for the physical facilities, concentrated in one or more buildings. Under the influence of financial pressure, some of the physical aspects of library tasks are sometimes carried out in buildings that are used by other organizations as well, with or without the library as a coordinator.

In discussing the role of the library, it is, therefore, useful to differentiate between three meanings of the term ‘library’: the function, the building and the organization. The function is vital, but may very well be carried out by different organizations in different buildings. The way this is carried out, may differ from city to city, depending on local circumstances.

University libraries are financed by a university to serve the academic community of their institution. Their collections are increasingly digital, especially scholarly journals.

Nevertheless, library buildings are more popular with students than ever. As has been said above, the services of these libraries are more and more integrated in the primary processes of the university. In many countries, there has been a centralization of library services within the university since the 1990s, due to the rise of ICT and budgetary pressure. Also in the 1990s, there was a trend towards integration of libraries and IT departments, but only in a limited number of cases this proved to be a success. More recently, shifting borders with other services can be observed, such as e-learning, e-research, data-management and publishing (Varnum, 2014). In most countries, university libraries cooperate on a regional and national level. While it would seem obvious that services for research would be organized along disciplinary lines, in practice this is hardly the case.

As mentioned above, the user is too often inconvenienced by the fact that the libraries are funded from different sources. Libraries are financed to serve local communities, while many communities are not local in the geographic or organizational sense. Currently, the digital collections from one library sector are not accessible for the users from other sectors, or only at conditions that are a considerable inconvenience or expense. A familiar example is the access to scientific information outside the scientific institutions.

Therefore, more cooperation is needed: between public libraries, between university libraries, but not least across the traditional borders within the library sector. This is a different form of

cooperation than most libraries are used to. In the traditional information chain we see vertical cooperation: organizations at different stages of the value chain cooperate, where often one organization acts as supplier for the other. What is needed now, is horizontal cooperation: organizations with the same products or services, operating at the same stage of the value chain, need to work together, adding their strength to gain benefits. This kind of cooperation has an emphasis on resource sharing, affects the internal processes and requires a well defined coordination (Varnum, 2014).

This is especially true with digital services. The provision of knowledge and information is at the basis of all library services and is digital in its core. Borders between different user groups should be flexible and adaptable to users' demands. This calls for a joint infrastructure which provides a platform for all parties involved to build services for targeted user groups. Let us call this the national digital library. The national library as an organization is the best candidate for setting up and maintaining this joint infrastructure, including the coordination of the intensified cooperation that comes with it.

The national digital library

The national digital library makes visible the content of all libraries financed by public funds. Its mission is: to provide easy access to information, which can be traced back to a recognizable source from an independent position.

Just as everyone can walk into a library building for information, or to read the newspaper, the national digital library is also accessible to everyone, from home or wherever one is.

Access is free of charge; no membership is required.

This means that people can easily:

- see what information is offered by publicly funded libraries (metadata);
- consult out-of-copyright information;
- become a member of the library for other information.

The out-of-copyright information that everyone can consult directly, contains in particular:

- cultural and scientific heritage being out-of-copyright, including anything published before 1874;
- the materials for which the copyright has been bought off, especially books, newspapers and magazines;
- Open Access materials, including scientific publications other than magazines based on the subscription model.

The digital library consists of three components:

- the collections of all libraries financed by public funds;
- the target groups: citizens, children, professionals, researchers, persons with a reading impairment, etc.;
- mediation between target groups and objects: searching and finding, personalizations, context; the library goes beyond offering information and helps the customer to get the maximum out of it.

In this structure, the customer may be provided with maximum service in his or her search for information. The national digital library provides a platform for all kinds of organizations, libraries and other, to provide additional services to their user groups. These services preferably are designed in close communication with the relevant user group, thus realizing the maximum added value to the sources available.

Essential in this structure is the role of libraries and the added value they provide. This starts with the independent position of the library. By definition, this role cannot be taken over by

the market. Libraries provide a safeguard that every citizen can get access to relevant and reliable information.

The availability of information sources is the responsibility of the national library: availability in the sense of being part of the collection but also the conditions under which they can be accessed. This should be arranged through licenses, preferably on a national basis, since it is not only inefficient but also too complicated to organize on a local basis. The financial means for this should at least partly be provided out of the funds for the participating libraries, whether or not through the ministry. For these licenses we should keep in mind that especially the public and the national library have a special responsibility to guarantee that also those who are financially deprived also have access to information and culture.

This concept of a national digital library forms a core element in the recently published strategic plan of the KB, National Library of the Netherlands (KB, 2014).

The national cultural heritage

The traditional core business of the national library is to collect, preserve and provide access to the national imprints. This, in all cases, includes books, magazines and journals. In many countries there is a legal deposit for this material; in other countries it has to be collected on a voluntary basis, whether or not supported by a general agreement with a publishers' organization.

As more and more publications are digital, the national library is confronted with a choice: will the collection policy remain hybrid, i.e. collecting both printed and digital material, regardless of a possible overlap? Or will there be a digital-by-default policy: collecting the digital publications, complemented by those printed publications that have no digital equivalent or constitute a special value by their form?

From a financial point of view, the hybrid policy sooner or later becomes untenable. Not only is storage expensive, but so are the work processes associated with it; this is especially true when the preservation policy is to guarantee access for the longer term. Every national library sooner or later will be urged to consider the digital format as primary and add the printed version only in special cases, and as a special selection to enabling future researchers concerned with, for instance, publishing and communication practice. When such a decision is to be expected anyway, it makes sense to make it as soon as possible, from budgetary as well as practical purposes.

In addition to this, digital availability gradually becomes a necessary condition for use of collections by people who are not specialized researchers. This brings forward the need of digitizing the collections that are only available in print. This is a rather expensive task, which in several countries is taken up by public/private partnerships, for instance with Google. In these cases it should be guaranteed that the library receives a copy of the scans for access and preservation purposes.

A special challenge is in the definition of 'a publication'. As has been mentioned above, new forms of 'born digital' publications and new forms of communication are arising; one has to decide which forms are to be preserved for future generations and to what extent. This goes for websites and blogs, as well as for other forms of social media that are fluid in concept and form. A selection will be necessary in most cases, which is complicated because of its implications: here we are confronted with the serious danger of depriving future generations of a proper heritage of our present.

Because of the increasing multimedia character of publications, cooperation is needed with other organizations in the cultural heritage sector for collection building, storage and preservation. It is necessary that the heritage institutions work on an integrated storage facility. In addition, users are demanding integrated access to various collections and are often

only moderately interested in the institutional origins. By making sensible agreements about metadata and aggregation, this is achievable.

In some countries, the possibility of the merging of institutions in the cultural heritage sector is being considered or has been implemented. However, for the level of cooperation that is needed, such a merger is not essential. It remains to be seen whether the supposed added value of such a merger counterbalances the complexities that are involved with the organizational issues involved.

Traditionally, national libraries have a specialised target user group in researchers in the humanities. This area is becoming even more interesting with the digital availability of sources, providing new possibilities for research, generally referred to as e-humanities. Direct interaction with the researchers involved is often necessary and, thus, cooperation with research institutions and university libraries is essential.

Role in society

When the role of the national library as ‘prime mover’ in the library sector is reinforced with the responsibility for the national cooperation as described above, it is associated with responsibilities in the social/political arena. As the national library becomes an increasingly important player in the information society, it has certain responsibilities in safeguarding democratic values.

Looking at the collection and its accessibility, this concerns safeguarding the heritage, as well as realizing openness of and access to information sources as much as possible. The national library should be a proactive participant in debates about these topics, with special attention to items as copyright and Open Access. In addition, it should actively enhance information literacy, also related to the threat of a digital divide, and the development of services for special user groups, in the light of the democratic values that underlie the existence of public libraries.

International cooperation

National libraries have a tradition in cooperation, in Europe as well as worldwide. This is especially true for legal aspects, such as the legal deposit and copyright, which are addressed in regular contacts and meetings. There have been efforts to link the catalogues of all (European) national libraries together. However, for a user this combination has hardly any added value in terms of retrievability in comparison to existing services.

THE NETWORKED NATIONAL LIBRARY

As argued above, we need to distinguish between different meanings of the term ‘library’: the function, the organization and the building. The function is the most essential one, because neither the organization nor the building can survive without it, while the function may exist without a specified organization or a building identifiable as library.

The organizational purpose of libraries will be less and less determined by their own mission, but increasingly by their network and the role that they play in it (Raad voor Cultuur, 2010).

As a result, intensive horizontal cooperation is becoming an essential condition of existence.

This concerns all libraries within a country that are financed with public funds. This cooperation will have to be realized without a change in the existing governing structures which are mainly determined by political arguments, emphasizing that municipalities have their own responsibility for the degree in which they fulfil the basic library tasks defined by the national policy. This implies that cooperation does not have a hierarchical structure.

At the basis of the cooperation is the national digital library, in the sense that it provides a platform enabling all services – national, regional or local – and also a necessary basis for

these services, independent of who develops or provides the service. The national library is responsible for this digital infrastructure and the synergy it enables. The national library provides, so to speak, the glue in the network of all publicly financed libraries.

There is no strong boundary between the digital library services and the services that are provided locally in a building. These boundaries are fluid and open to change. Gradually, it will become impossible to draw a clear line between digital and 'physical' services or to distinguish organizationally.

As a consequence, the national digital library will pervade all library services within the country and interact with them. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish strictly between what is local and what is national.

In this context it makes sense to no longer restrict the term 'national library' to the organization that is responsible for the synergy or the building in which the coordinating activities are housed. The term 'national library', then, should be applied not to the organization or the building, but to the function and then it refers to all library services. The organization that is responsible for these services, then, is an organization consisting of a number of more or less independent entities, without a hierarchical relation, with strong links to each other, working together for a common purpose, in other words it is a networked organization.

The nucleus of this network is the institute, financed by the national government, that is responsible for the synergy. It includes responsibility for the national heritage. The term 'last resort', however, is no longer applicable in this context.

In the role of custodian of the national heritage, the national library has a strong relation with other institutions in the cultural heritage sector. Developments in this sector, for instance for archives, will, to a certain extent, be comparable and parallel to those described above for the library sector. There is cooperation on the national level and in a number of cases also on the regional level. In the longer term this may even supersede the national library in the sense described above.

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