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Invisible Library

Library clients see nowadays less and less collections. Most of the acquisition money that libraries spend goes to electronic materials. They are 'invisible', because they can be accessed only through user interface, OPAC. In addition, they form only an 'abstract' collection, which cannot be seen. Therefore, when searching information, it is easy to think that all relevant information was not found, i.e. something was left 'hidden' in the database.

Many people think that electronic information is like electricity. One plugs his/her computer to the wall and all information in the world can be accessed with no cost. They don't remember that libraries pay enormous sums of money for scientific information provided by publishers.

The physical collections of the Finnish university libraries are diminishing. They can't afford having large collections, because space is expensive. Rent has to be paid for every square meter they use. Therefore Finnish university libraries, including Jyväskylä University Library, are weeding heavily. Just two years ago they sent almost seven shelf kilometers of material to the National Repository Library of Finland².

¹ Jyväskylä University Library.

² Varastokirjasto, *Toimintakertomus 2014* (Annual report 2014, in Finnish) <<http://www.varastokirjasto.fi/asiakirjat/toimintakertomus2014.pdf>> (ultimo accesso 26.04.2017).

Space is also needed for students, who come to the library to study, do group work, see friends, and just hang around. Bookshelves are replaced with tables and chairs, recreation areas, and cafeterias. This trend is clear and pace is increasing as shown in [Figure 1](#).

The number of printed books in Finnish University libraries has diminished considerably during the past six years (note, that the vertical scale of the diagram exaggerates this, because it doesn't start from zero). However, it can clearly be seen that during the period 2009-2014 libraries have weeded about one million books.

In spite of all ongoing weeding it has to be noted, that there are still some 11 million books in Finnish university libraries for their clients to use.

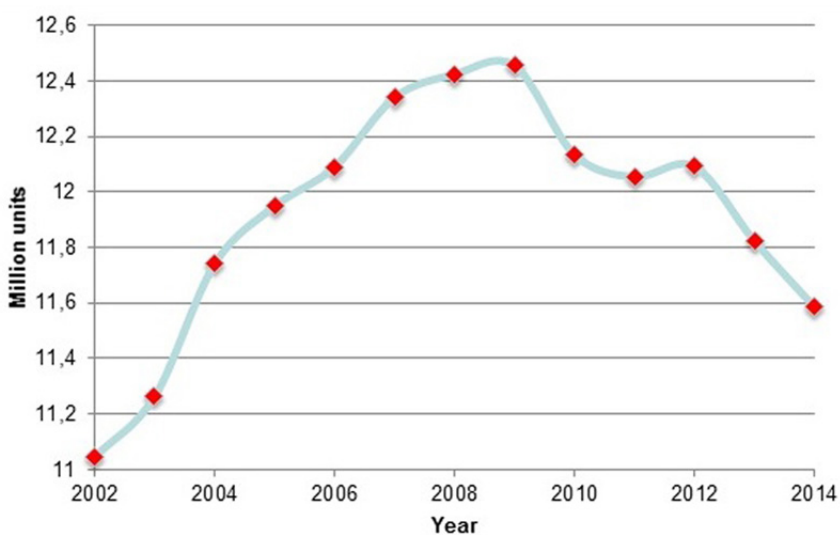


Fig. 1 – Number of books in Finnish university libraries (MUHONEN, 2015)

Information seeking behavior of professors

In a survey conducted in the Spring of 2015 professors of the University of Jyväskylä as well as University of Eastern Finland were

asked, which means they have used to find information. The information seeking behavior of 200 professors who answered the questionnaire are depicted in Figure 2³.

89% of the professors had used electronic materials provided by their university library during the six month period before the survey, that is from January to June, 2015. About half of them had borrowed printed books.

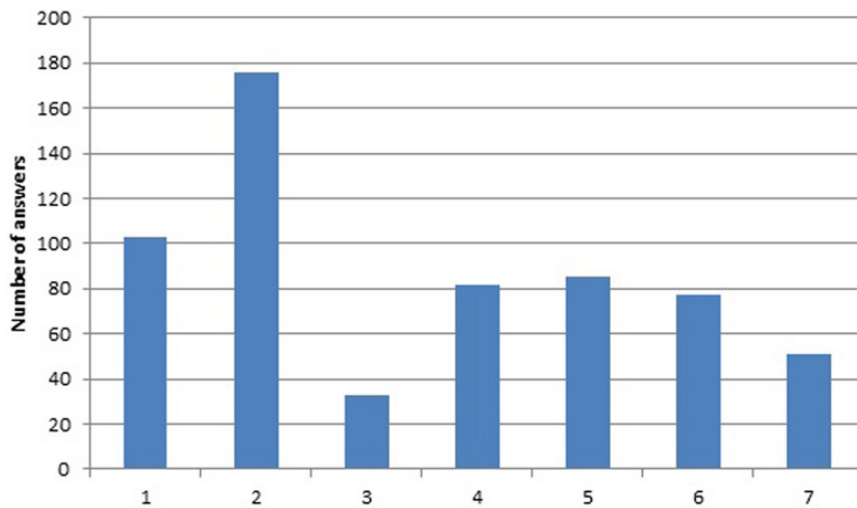


Fig. 2 – Information seeking behavior of the professors in University of Jyväskylä and University of Eastern Finland (N = 198). On the x-axis 1 = checked out material from the university library, 2 = used electronic materials via the library, 3 = used ILL, 4 = purchased books from a bookstore, 5 = purchased books from an electronic bookstore, 6 = purchased electronic documents and/or materials, 7 = other means

Alarmingly, about 40% of the professors had purchased printed or electronic materials themselves. Is this a sign of distrust to the libraries or are they simply getting ample amounts of money to their research projects? The survey did not give an answer, and it is definitely worthwhile to do further research in order to find out reasons for this.

³ A. MUHONEN and J. SAARTI, *The changing paradigm of document delivery - exploring researchers' peer to peer practices*, in «Interlending & Document Supply», 44, n. 2, 2016, pp. 66-71.

Only 17% of the professors used interlibrary lending. Is that not needed anymore? This problem is tackled later on in this paper.

It is also interesting, that 26% of the professors mentioned some other means. These included open access journals, Google Scholar, personal webpages of scholars, and direct contacts with authors. This means that professors have a lot of choices to find relevant information for their research. Library is not necessarily their first choice, anymore, if it has ever been one.

New paradigms for libraries

Libraries need to improve their services in order to maintain their good reputation among clients. We are already in a paradigm shift from printed to electronic materials. However, that is not enough.

Libraries have already lost their clients to Google Scholar when it comes to information seeking. Their databases are not enough for them, when they want to find information. Therefore libraries should concentrate on access.

In the old times libraries placed all possible material to their shelves just in case somebody needs them in the future. This was relevant at that time, because it was very difficult to locate a book or a journal article elsewhere. Only skilled ILL librarians could do that, but it was time consuming and perhaps expensive.

Nowadays one can search databases of practically every library in the world. In addition, it is expensive to keep large print collections. Therefore libraries should make another paradigm shift from 'just-in-case' to 'just-on-time'. They should be able to locate and deliver every piece of information their client needs as quickly as possible.

Libraries are already changing their mindset from ownership to access and optimizing – not maximizing – the space for their

collections. Libraries have to think their overall costs and figure out the most cost effective way to serve their customers.

Libraries should also change their mindset from card catalogues to services. Researchers do not anymore come to library to find material. Instead they have to be served the best possible way wherever they are and any time.

Libraries have to be designed for students as a place they can do their studies. Librarians need to know, how modern students use technology and what they need to perform well. Library can be a learning hub, which offers everything students need, except teachers.

New user interface

One way of making a library more visible to its clients is to develop a user interface, which brings together information from a variety of sources. Clients are not interested in the origin of the document as long as they get what they need.

Therefore libraries should create an interface, which combines all the information they can provide (Fig. 3). It should include all printed and electronic materials of their own, everything they can borrow from other libraries as well as get from open access sources. It should also include staff expertise, because that is also one of the assets of the library.

An ideal for such an interface is a simple box where a client can cut and paste the reference he/she needs. If the document is available in electronic form, it should be delivered to the client automatically. If it is available in print form, library staff should take care of the delivery. If the library doesn't own the document, the request would go to the acquisition department, which would either buy the document or send an ILL request.

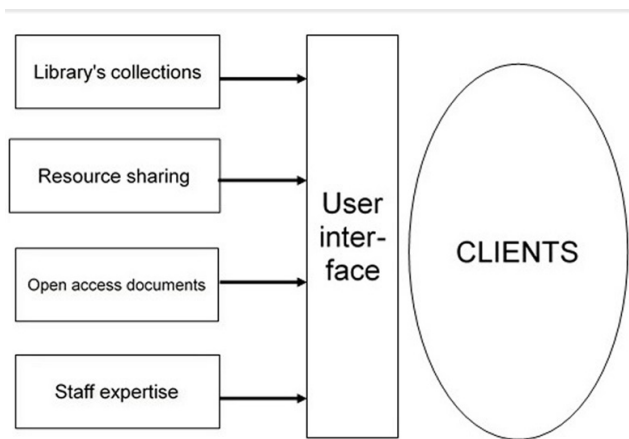


Fig. 3 – Scheme of a new library interface (MUHONEN, 2015)⁴

Extended life cycle of a document

I have wondered for quite some time the way, how libraries could use their collections more effectively. I have created an idea of the extended life cycle of a printed document. It is shown in [Figure 4](#). It means that the best location for a document is a shelf where it has the biggest possibility to be found by a user⁵.

If a researcher uses a document extensively, he/she should have it in his/her own bookshelf. When the document is not needed anymore, it should be placed in a faculty library or main library of the university. When the topic is not relevant to the university anymore, the document can be forwarded elsewhere,

⁴ A. MUHONEN., *Invisible collections. Aligning commercial and public document repositories to facilitate free and sustainable information*, 25th Anniversary Conference of the National Repository Library of Finland. 21-22 May, 2015, Kuopio, Finland. <<http://www.varastokirjasto.fi/kuopio5/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2014/11/Muhonen.pdf>> (ultimo accesso 26.04.2017).

⁵ A. MUHONEN, J. SAARTI, and P. VATTULAINEN, *From the centralized national collection policy towards a decentralized collection management and resource sharing co-operation - Finnish experiences*, in «Library Management», 35, n. 1-2, 2014, pp. 111-122.

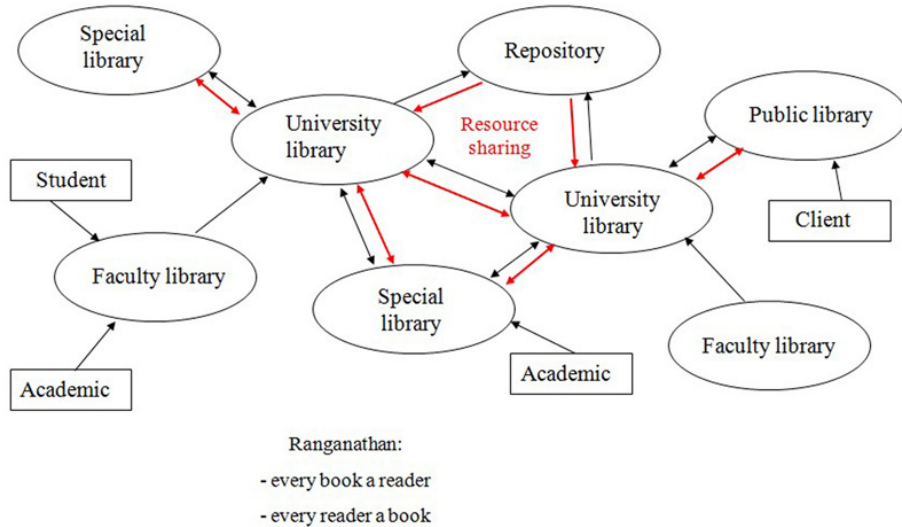


Fig. 4 – Extended life cycle of a document (MUHONEN *et al.*, 2014)

where it can find even larger audience. This idea is simply following one of the famous Ranganathan rules: every book a reader, every reader a book.

Optimizing library collections through resource sharing

When this idea is expanded to national and even international level, it can be thought to be one form of resource sharing. It is a true way of optimizing library's collections and making full use of them⁶.

Every library should have a written collection policy, which defines the strengths of its collections, but also subject areas, which are not so important. That document should be on its web pages publically available.

Then a group of libraries could agree on mutual resource sharing, where each library relies on collections of other libraries. This may sound like normal interlibrary lending. However, the

⁶ *Ibid.*

idea is extended also to collection policies. That is something new, at least in Finland.

With true resource sharing a library can optimize its printed collections and trust that if a client needs something it doesn't have, it can be obtained elsewhere.

ILDS should also be made a real option to the user. Making a request should be as easy as possible, and it should be free of charge. In Finland university libraries still charge eight to ten euros for each request from the client. That should be changed.

Logistics should also be developed. Ideally an ILL request should be fulfilled in 24 hours. It should be possible within one country, but it is probably challenging in international level.

New definition of ILDS

The definition of interlibrary lending says that it is action between libraries. Currently a client sends an ILL request to his/her home library, which then forwards it to the lending library. The document is then delivered to the client through the home library again. This is shown in [Figure 5](#).

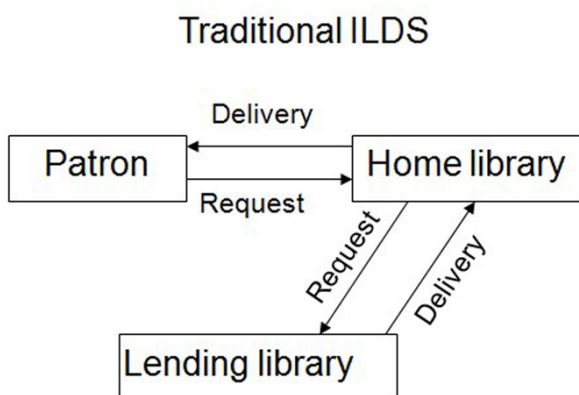


Fig. 5 – Traditional ILDS (MUHONEN *et al.*, 2014)

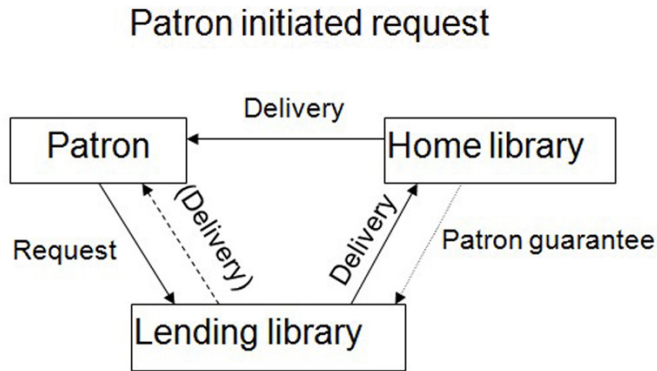


Fig. 6 – ILDS chain according to the new definition (MUHONEN *et al.*, 2014)

What if the client could request a document straight from the lending library and perhaps even get the document straight to him/herself, not through the home library? Would this be possible? Yes, if ILDS is redefined as: «Patron initiated requesting is action between libraries and their trusted patrons. Libraries assure the trustworthiness of their own personal clients». This means that home library could allow its clients, or the ones it can trust, to make a direct request to the lending library. The lending library could trust the client and lend the needed material. If something goes wrong, home library would help in solving the case⁷.

Trust is the crucial element. Do we trust each other, and do we trust our clients? We should.

Conclusions

I state that libraries have become more invisible, because clients see less and less collections. They do use our services and

⁷ *Ibid.*

materials but without thinking, or even knowing that they deal with a library.

Our clients have plenty of choices for finding information. We should make sure that library is one of their top choices. For that we have to improve our services. Especially we have to give them a user interface, which provides them all possible material and library expertise with as little effort from client as possible. It is a big challenge, but a crucial one for us.

Libraries are already in a paradigm shift from printed to digital materials. However, that is not enough. We should also change our mindset from 'just-in-case' to 'just-on-time'. We don't need to own everything published in the world, it is not at all possible anymore. We should not boast of the size of our collections. Instead, we should be able to give our clients access to all documents they need, one way or another.

For that we should rely even more on resource sharing than we do right now. We should expand the idea to our collection policies. We should redefine interlibrary lending, and form new partnerships.

And most of all, we should trust each other and our clients.